

# **THE SPIRITUALITY OF ATHANASIUS**

**A KEY FOR PROPER UNDERSTANDING  
OF HIS LIFE AND THOUGHT**

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*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live,  
but Christ lives in me.*

*Galatians 2:20*



## DECLARATION

*I hereby declare that this thesis has been composed by myself and that the work contained herein is my own.*

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Nathan K. K. Ng

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the course of this study, I have been indebted to a number of people, without whose help and support this thesis could never been completed. Here, I want to send my sincere gratitude to all those who have helped me in completing this work.

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Above all, I would like to thank my God. In my study, I truly can see His hands helping me in every aspect. He is my Creator, my Saviour, and my Counsellor. To Him is glory forever and ever.

Nathan K. K. Ng

July 2000 in Edinburgh

## ABSTRACT

In the last few decades, a revival of Athanasian studies has appeared amongst scholars. While some praise the Alexandrian bishop, some denounce him. Their views are very often diverse, or even opposite, and a confusing situation thus formed. Because of the partial nature of our extant historical sources, it is almost impossible to solve this problem by following the traditional way of reconstructing the historical picture of Athanasius. This thesis tries to deal with the problem with a new key—spirituality.

Since we do not have sufficient information about the formative factors of Athanasius' spirituality, and the intention of his spiritual teachings is being questioned by some scholars, we begin our study with his theological conviction. Chapter One 'Spirituality and Theology' analyses the theology of Athanasius through our understanding of the factors affecting his spirituality. Here, we find that his theological system was deeply influenced and controlled by his personal background. Besides, this chapter also explores the theological base of his spiritual teachings by investigating his soteriology, especially his doctrine about spiritual advancement. Here, we find that in Athanasius' mind what a Christian needs to do is to try their best to walk on the way to God by *contemplating God with a pure soul through virtuous life*.

In Chapter Two 'Spirituality and Asceticism,' we illustrate how Athanasius' spiritual ideal developed in his theology is concretised in his ascetic teachings. Here, the major concepts of Athanasius' asceticism are traced. Responding to the modern scholarly challenge, we also evaluate the sincerity of these ascetic teachings by investigating their consistence and coherence with his theological system and the contemporary ideology. In addition to Athanasius' general views on asceticism, this chapter also includes his special advice to the female virgins and the desert monks. All these teachings are shown to be natural inheritances of the ecclesiastical tradition and are governed by Athanasius' theology and spirituality.

Amongst the spiritual writings of Athanasius, the most important and influential is the *Vita Antonii*. In Chapter Three 'Spirituality in the *Vita Antonii*,' the messages and the influences of this weighty spiritual work of Athanasius are analysed specifically. In contrast with the political motives proposed by some modern scholars, we find that the main theme of this hagiography is pastoral. It aims at teaching people how to follow Antony and walk on the way to God successfully. Its messages are totally consistent with the theology and other ascetic teachings of Athanasius.

In the final chapter 'Spirituality and the Life of Athanasius,' what have been found about the spirituality of the bishop are put back onto his living context. Here, we find that the prevalent picture of the historical Athanasius portrayed by modern critics is not unchallengeable. The bishop had actually tried to live according to his spiritual ideal. He was relatively reluctant in responding the accusations of his opponents. In contrast, he was highly interested in the monastic movement of his time and had put great effort to guide his flock on the way to God. Besides, his behaviours in the Arian controversy are also understandable. Because many Athanasian scholars have unsuitably separated his thought and deeds, unfair charges are imposed on him. Spirituality is certainly an important key for proper understanding of his life.

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# ABBREVIATIONS

## The Writings of Athanasius of Alexandria

<i>Ad Adelph.</i>	<i>Epistula ad Adelphium</i> (CPG 2098)
<i>Ad Aeg. Lib.</i>	<i>Epistula ad Episcopos Aegypti et Libyae</i> (CPG 2092)
<i>Ad Afr.</i>	<i>Epistula ad Afros</i> (CPG 2133) <sup>1</sup>
<i>Ad Amun</i>	<i>Epistula ad Amun</i> (CPG 2106)
<i>Ad Drac.</i>	<i>Epistula ad Dracontium</i> (CPG 2132)
<i>Ad Epic.</i>	<i>Epistula ad Epictetum</i> (CPG 2095)
<i>Ad Episc.</i>	<i>Epistula ad Episcopos Encyclica</i> (CPG 2124)
<i>Ad Ioh. Ant.</i>	<i>Epistula ad Iohannem et Antiochum Presbyteros</i> (CPG 2130) <sup>2</sup>
<i>Ad Iov.</i>	<i>Epistula ad Imperatorem Iovianum</i> (CPG 2135)
<i>Ad Mar.</i>	<i>Epistula ad Marcellinum</i> (CPG 2097)
<i>Ad Max.</i>	<i>Epistula ad Maximum</i> (CPG 2100) <sup>3</sup>
<i>Ad Mon. I-II</i>	<i>Epistulae ad Monachos I-II</i> (CPG 2108, 2126)
<i>Ad Ors. I-II</i>	<i>Epistulae ad Orsiesium I-II</i> (CPG 2103, 2104)
<i>Ad Pall.</i>	<i>Epistula ad Palladium</i> (CPG 2131) <sup>4</sup>
<i>Ad Ruf.</i>	<i>Epistula ad Rufinianum</i> (CPG 2107)
<i>Ad Serap.</i>	<i>Epistulae ad Serapionem</i> (CPG 2094, 2096)
<i>Ad Serap. M. Ar.</i>	<i>Epistula ad Serapionem de Morte Arii</i> (CPG 2125)
<i>Ad Virgin. Ara.</i>	<i>Epistula ad Virgines (Arabice)</i> (CPG 2154)
<i>Ad Virgin. Cop.</i>	<i>Epistula ad Virgines (Coptice)</i> (CPG 2147) <sup>5</sup>
<i>Ad Virgin. Syr.</i>	<i>Epistula ad Virgines (Syriace)</i> (CPG 2146) <sup>6</sup>
<i>Apol. Ar.</i>	<i>Apologia Secunda (contra Arianos)</i> (CPG 2123)
<i>Apol. Const.</i>	<i>Apologia ad Imperatorem Constantium</i> (CPG 2129)
<i>Apol. Fuga</i>	<i>Apologia de Fuga Sua</i> (CPG 2122)
<i>C. Gent.</i>	<i>Contra Gentes</i> (CPG 2090)

<sup>1</sup> C. Kannengiesser argues that this work is not authentic. However, his arguments are based largely on an unsettled hypothesis that the *Or. Ar.* 3 is spurious and the validity of his conclusion is questionable. His view is not common amongst scholars. Cf. C. Kannengiesser, '(Ps.-) Athanasius, Ad Afros Examined,' *Logos—Festschrift für Luise Abramowski zum 8. Juli 1993* (Berlin and New York, 1993), pp.264-280.

<sup>2</sup> In the *TRE*, M. Tetz describes this work as 'wahrscheinlich unecht.' His view is not common amongst scholars. Cf. M. Tetz, 'Athanasius von Alexandrien,' *TRE* 4:344.

<sup>3</sup> As *Ad Afr.*, C. Kannengiesser argues that this work is not Athanasian, but is a well-crafted literary 'montage.' However, his arguments are based largely on the same unsettled hypothesis that the *Or. Ar.* 3 is spurious and his judgement is questionable. Cf. C. Kannengiesser, 'L'énigme de la lettre au philosophe Maxime d'Athanasie d'Alexandrie,' *Ἀλεξανδρινὰ, Mélanges offerts au P. Claude Modérest* (Paris, 1987), pp.261-276.

<sup>4</sup> M. Tetz describes this work also as 'wahrscheinlich unecht.' Again, his view is not common amongst scholars. Cf. Tetz, 'Athanasius von Alexandrien,' 4:344.

<sup>5</sup> The section divisions and their numbers are based on the English translation in D. B. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford, 1995), pp.274-291.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.292-302.

<i>De Car. Tem.</i>	<i>De Caritate et Temperantia</i> (CPG 2151)
<i>De Decretis</i>	<i>De Decretis Nicaenae Synodi</i> (CPG 2120)
<i>De Incarn.</i>	<i>De Incarnatione Verbi Dei</i> (CPG 2091)
<i>De Mor. Val.</i>	<i>De Morbo et Valetudine</i> (CPG 2160) <sup>7</sup>
<i>De Sent. Dion.</i>	<i>De Sententia Dionysii</i> (CPG 2121)
<i>De Syn.</i>	<i>De Synodis Arimini in Italia et Seleucia in Isauria</i> (CPG 2128)
<i>Ep. Fest.</i>	<i>Epistulae Festales</i> (CPG 2102) <sup>8</sup>
<i>Exh. Virgin.</i>	<i>Epistula Exhortatoria ad Virgines</i> (CPG 2162)
<i>Exp. Pss</i>	<i>Expositiones in Psalmos</i> (CPG 2140)
<i>Fra. Cat.</i>	<i>Fragmenta in Catenis</i> (CPG 2141)
<i>Fra. Cop.</i>	<i>Fragmenta (Coptice)</i> (CPG 2152) <sup>9</sup>
<i>Fra. Sin.</i> (ap. Shen. 1)	<i>Fragmenta apud Sinuthium, Moysen et Constantinum Assiutenum</i> (ap. Shen. 1) (CPG 2150)
<i>Hist. Ar.</i>	<i>Historia Arianorum</i> (CPG 2127)
<i>Om. Tra.</i>	<i>In Illud: Omnia mihi Tradita Sunt</i> (CPG 2099)
<i>Or. Ar. 1-3</i>	<i>Orationes contra Arianos 1-3</i> (CPG 2093) <sup>10</sup>
<i>Ser. Virgin.</i>	<i>Sermo de Virginitate</i> (CPG 2145) <sup>11</sup>
<i>Tom. Ant.</i>	<i>Tomus ad Antichenos</i> (CPG 2134)
<i>V. Ant.</i>	<i>Vita Antonii</i> (CPG 2101)

### The Dubious Writings of Athanasius of Alexandria

<i>C. Apol.</i>	<i>De Incarnatione Contra Apollinarium</i> (CPG 2231) <sup>12</sup>
<i>Fra. Sin.</i>	<i>Fragmenta apud Sinuthium, Moysen et Constantinum Assiutenum</i> (ap. Shen. 2; ap. Mos.; ap. Con.) (CPG 2150)
<i>Pra. Virgin.</i>	<i>Praecepta ad Virgines</i> (CPG 2148)
<i>Tra. Ace. Virgin.</i>	<i>Tractatus Acephalus de Virginitate</i> (CPG 2149)

### The Spurious Writings of Athanasius of Alexandria

<i>Ad Eup.</i>	<i>Epistula ad Eupsychium</i> (CPG 2163)
<i>All. Mon.</i>	<i>Allocutio ad Monachos</i> (CPG 2186)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp.310-313.

<sup>8</sup> The order of the *Epistulae Festales* is based on the conclusion in A. Camplani, *Le Lettere festali di Atanasio di Alessandria: Studio storico-critico* (Rome, 1980), pp.195-196. See Appendix E of this thesis for the new order. Similar order is suggested by R. Lorenz. Cf. R. Lorenz, *Der zehnte Osterfestbrief des Athanasius von Alexandrien: Text, Übersetzung, Erläuterungen* (Berlin and New York, 1986), pp.30-31. The section divisions and their numbers are based on the English translation in A. Robertson, ed., *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria*, LNPf2 4, pp.506-553.

<sup>9</sup> The section divisions and their numbers are based on the English translation in Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, pp.314-319.

<sup>10</sup> C. Kannengiesser argues that the *Or. Ar. 3* is spurious, but his conclusion is not commonly accepted. On this issue, see L. Abramowski, 'Die dritte Arianerrede des Athanasius: Eusebianer und Arianer und das westliche Serdicense,' *ZKG* 102 (1991):389-413.

<sup>11</sup> The section divisions and their numbers are based on the English translation in Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, pp.303-309.

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of its authorship, see Appendix B of this thesis.



<i>C. Sab.</i>	<i>Contra Sabellianos</i> (CPG 2243)
<i>Can. Ath.</i>	<i>Canones Athanasii</i> (CPG 2302)
<i>De Virgin.</i>	<i>De Virginitate</i> (CPG 2248)
<i>De Virgin. Syr.</i>	<i>De Virginitate (Syriace)</i> (CPG 2219) <sup>13</sup>
<i>Or. Ar. 4</i>	<i>Oratio contra Arianos 4</i> (CPG 2230)
<i>Quic.</i>	<i>Quicumque (Symbolum Athanasianum)</i> (CPG 2295)
<i>Syn. Mon.</i>	<i>Syntagma ad Monachos</i> (CPG 2264)
<i>Test. Script.</i>	<i>Testimonia e Scriptura</i> (CPG 2240)
<i>V. Syncl.</i>	<i>Vita sanctae Syncleticae</i> (CPG 2293)

## Modern Journals and Series

<i>AA</i>	<i>Arius and Athanasius: Two Alexandrian Theologians.</i> By C. Kannengiesser. Hampshire and Brookfield, 1991.
<i>ACW</i>	Ancient Christian Writers
<i>AHTR</i>	<i>Arianism: Historical and Theological Reassessments; Papers from the Ninth International Conference on Patristic Studies, September 5-10, 1983.</i> Edited by R. C. Gregg. Patristic Monograph Series 11. Philadelphia, 1985.
<i>AME</i>	<i>Antonius Magnus Eremita.</i> Edited by B. Steidle. Rome, 1956.
<i>ANL</i>	The Ante-Nicene Christian Library
<i>AnThR</i>	<i>Anglican Theological Review</i>
<i>Asc</i>	<i>Asceticism.</i> Edited by V. Wimbush and R. Valantasis. New York and Oxford, 1995.
<i>Ath</i>	<i>Athanasiana: Essays in the Theology of St. Athanasius</i> , vol. 1. By G. D. Dragas. London, 1980.
<i>CCR</i>	<i>Coptic Church Review</i>
<i>CETh</i>	<i>Companion Encyclopedia of Theology.</i> Edited by P. Byrne and L. Houlden. London and New York, 1995.
<i>CH</i>	<i>Church History</i>
<i>CO</i>	Cahiers d'Orientalisme
<i>CPG</i>	<i>Clavis Patrum Graecorum.</i> 5 vols. Edited by M. Geerard and F. Glorie. Brepols-Turnhout, 1974-1987.
<i>CPG Supplement</i>	<i>Clavis Patrum Graecorum—Supplementum.</i> Edited by M. Geerard and J. Noret. Brepols-Turnhout, 1998.
<i>CSCO</i>	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
<i>CSEL</i>	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
<i>CSp</i>	<i>Christian Spirituality.</i> Vol. 1: <i>Origins to the Twelfth Century</i> , edited by B. McGinn, J. Meyendorff and J. Leclercq. Vol. 2: <i>High Middle Ages and Reformation</i> , edited by J. Raitt. Vol. 3: <i>Post-Reformation and Modern</i> , edited by L. Dupré and D. E. Saliers. London, 1986-1989.

<sup>13</sup> The treatise only appears in the 1998 *CPG Supplement*, not in the 1974 edition.



DCS	<i>A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality</i> . Edited by G. Wakefield. London, 1983.
EEChr	<i>Encyclopedia of Early Christianity</i> . Edited by E. Ferguson. 2 vols. 2 <sup>nd</sup> edition. New York and London, 1997.
EEChu	<i>Encyclopedia of the Early Church</i> . Edited by Angelo Di Berardino. Translated by A. Walford. 2 vols. Cambridge, 1992.
FC	The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation.
GCS	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten (drei) Jahrhunderte.
HThR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
JEA	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i>
JEH	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
JThS (NS)	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i> (New Series)
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LF	A Library of the Fathers.
LNPF2	A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. Edited by P. Schaff and H. Wace. Second series.
MCS	<i>Modern Christian Spirituality: Methodological and Historical Essays</i> . Edited by B. C. Hanson. Atlanta, 1990.
Mus	<i>Le Muséon</i>
NIDNTT	<i>The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i> . Edited by C. Brown. Exeter, 1975.
OCA	Orientalia Christiana Analecta
OCP	Orientalia Christiana Periodica
ODCC	<i>The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church</i> . Edited by F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone. 3 <sup>rd</sup> edition. Oxford, 1997.
OLP	Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica
PG	Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Graeca. 161 Vols. Edited by J. P. Migne.
PGL	<i>A Patristic Greek Lexicon</i> . Edited by G. W. H. Lampe. Oxford, 1961.
PL	Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Latina. 221 vols. Edited by J. P. Migne.
PO	Patrologia Orientalis
PT	<i>Politique et théologie chez Athanase d'Alexandrie</i> . Actes du Colloque de Chantilly, 23-25 Septembre 1973. Edited by C. Kannengiesser. Théologie historique 27. Paris, 1974.
PTS	Patristische Texte und Studien
REC	<i>The Roots of Egyptian Christianity</i> . Edited by B. A. Pearson and J. E. Goehring. Philadelphia, 1986.
RHE	<i>Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique</i>
RSR	<i>Recherches de Science Religieuse</i>
RThR	<i>Reformed Theological Review</i>

SC	Sources Chr�tiennes
SJTh	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
Sob	<i>Sobornost</i>
StP	<i>Studia Patristica</i> . Papers presented to the International Conference on Patristic Studies held at Christ Church, Oxford.
ThSt	<i>Theological Studies</i>
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . 10 vols. Edited by G. Kittel. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids, 1964-1976.
TDOR	<i>Theological Dialogue between Orthodox &amp; Reformed Churches</i> , vol. 2. Edited by T. F. Torrance. Edinburgh, 1993.
TRE	<i>Theologische Realenzyklop�die</i> . Berlin and New York, 1977-.
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur
Urkunde	<i>Urkunden zur Geschichte des arianischen Streites 318-328. Werke, hrsg. im Auftrage der Kirchenv�ter-Kommission der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften</i> , vol. 3, 1, 1-76. Edited by H.-G. Opitz. Berlin, 1934.
VC	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
ZKG	<i>Zeitschrift f�r Kirchengeschichte</i>
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift f�r die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der �lteren Kirche</i>
ZThK	<i>Zeitschrift f�r Theologie und Kirche</i>

# CHRONOLOGY OF ATHANASIUS' CAREER

## Early Years

295-298	Born
318	Ordained as a deacon
325	Council of Nicaea
328 June	Consecrated as the Archbishop of Alexandria Three tours visiting monks of different areas <i>C. Gent., De Incarn.</i>

## First Exile

335 Nov.	First exile to Gaul
337 Nov.	Returned from first exile Invited Antony to visit Alexandria <i>Ad Virgin. Cop.</i>

## Second Exile

339 April	Second exile in Italy and Gaul, accompanied by some monks Promoted monasticism in the West <i>Ad Episc., Or. Ar.</i>
346 Oct.	Returned from second exile Ordained monks as priests, great spiritual revival in Egypt <i>De Decretis, De Sent. Dion., Ad Amun, Ad Drac.</i>

## Third Exile

356 Feb.	Third exile among Egyptian monks or hiding in Alexandria <i>Ad Aeg. Lib., Apol. Const., Apol. Fuga, Apol. Ar., Hist. Ar., Ad Mon. I-II, Ad Serap. M. Ar., Ad Serap., De Syn., V. Ant., Exh. Virgin., Ad Virgin. Ara.</i>
362 Feb.	Returned from third exile <i>Tom. Ant., Ad Ruf.</i>

## Fourth Exile

362 Oct.	Fourth exile to Upper Egypt Visited monks in Thebaid <i>Ad Ors. I, Ad Iov.</i>
364 Feb.	Returned from fourth exile

## Fifth Exile

365 Oct.	Fifth exile
366 Feb.	Returned from fifth exile Reappeared in monastic areas <i>Ad Ors. II, Ad Afr., Ad Epic., Ad Adelph., Ad Max., Ad Pall.</i>
373 May	Athanasius died

# INTRODUCTION

False accusations were made against him to the Emperor Constantine and Athanasius was exiled five times and was said to have hidden in various places in Europe and the Egyptian desert.<sup>1</sup>

His use of violence and intimidation also contributed to the strength of the opposition to him and was the specific ground for his deposition at the Council of Tyre in 335 and his exile to Trier in 336.<sup>2</sup>

The above antagonistic descriptions extracted from two encyclopaedia entries, both published in the last few years, reveal clearly the confused situation of modern Athanasian studies. Beginning from 1980s, an increasing number of works were written on this controversial, but important, Alexandrian bishop. While some denounce him, some defend him. As C. Kannengiesser says, 'There seems to be a revival of Athanasian studies in the air, directly called for by the lively and fruitful debate on Arianism.'<sup>3</sup> To understand the life and thought of Athanasius, we must first have an idea of this scholarly debate.

## A. A Confused Situation—Modern Studies of Athanasius<sup>4</sup>

Athanasius has long been regarded as a pious saint in the Church. Traditionally, he has been believed to be a great supporter of monasticism. According to Augustine's *Confessiones*, after a young imperial official Ponticianus read through his *Vita Antonii*, he gave up his attractive career and became a monk. Most probably, this testimony hastened Augustine's own conversion to ascetic Christianity too.<sup>5</sup> In the controversy of doctrine in the fourth century, Athanasius represents a godly hero who alone defended the traditional faith uncowedly under the threats of Roman emperors. He is the steadfast champion against Arians. Basil the Great thus describes him as a 'physician of the diseases in the Churches' (ἱατρὸν τῶν ἐν ταῖς Ἐκκλησίαις ἀρρωστημάτων).<sup>6</sup> Also, Athanasius has the stamp of orthodox doctrine. On this account, Gregory of Nazianzus praises him as 'the pillar of the Church' (ὁ στύλος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. C. Cooper, ed., 'Athanasius, St.,' *Cassell Dictionary of Christianity* (London and New York, 1996), p.16.

<sup>2</sup> 'Athanasius, St.,' *ODCC*, p.119.

<sup>3</sup> C. Kannengiesser, 'St. Athanasius of Alexandria Rediscovered: His Political and Pastoral Achievement,' *CCR* 9 (1988):68.

<sup>4</sup> For studies of Athanasius before 1940s and 1980s, see also F. L. Cross, *The Study of Athanasius*, Oxford, 1945; and D. W.-H. Arnold, 'Athanasian Historiography: A Century of Revision,' *CCR* 12 (1991):3-14 respectively.

<sup>5</sup> Augustine, *Confessiones* 8.6 (PL 32, col.755).

<sup>6</sup> Basil, *Epistula* 82 (PG 32, col.460).

<sup>7</sup> Gregory, *Oratio* 21.26 (SC 270, p.164). Concerning the orthodox image of Athanasius, Egan describes, 'Athanasius was a very prominent figure in fourth century Christianity, as the leader of the opposition

Until a century ago, this sublime image of Athanasius was still firmly sited in church history. Nearly all scholars in the nineteenth century commended him in their works. These scholars include J. A. Moehler,<sup>8</sup> J. M. Neale,<sup>9</sup> A. Neander,<sup>10</sup> A. P. Stanley,<sup>11</sup> J. H. Newman,<sup>12</sup> J. Kaye,<sup>13</sup> F. Fialon,<sup>14</sup> W. Bright,<sup>15</sup> J. Ridgway,<sup>16</sup> R. W. Bush,<sup>17</sup> H. R. Reynolds,<sup>18</sup> F. W. Farrar,<sup>19</sup> A. Robertson<sup>20</sup> and many others.<sup>21</sup> Just by seeing what has been said by the last two of the list, we will be able to perceive the general image of Athanasius in that generation. In 1889, Farrar concluded about Athanasius after a lengthy biography, 'His was a deeply religious mind. Faith inspired and brightened his whole career...The prevailing attribute of his intellect was versatility, of his conduct moderation, of his character courage, of his religion faithfulness...His energy roused the sluggish, and his balanced wisdom repressed the extravagant.'<sup>22</sup> Similarly, in his 1891

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against the Arian heresy. These efforts earned for him the title "The Father of Orthodoxy." G. A. Egan, ed. and tr., *The Armenian Version of the Letters of Athanasius to Bishop Serapion Concerning the Holy Spirit*, Studies and Documents 37 (Salt Lake City, 1968), p.vii.

<sup>8</sup> Moehler commended Athanasius as 'an angry saint toward those who were the enemies of souls, bought by the blood of Jesus Christ.' J. A. Moehler, *Athanase le Grand et l'église de son temps en lutte avec l'Arianisme*, vol.1 (Bruxelles, 1841-42), p.109.

<sup>9</sup> Neale declared that Athanasius was known in his church by the title of 'the Apostolic Patriarch.' Cf. J. M. Neale, *A History of the Holy Eastern Church: The Patriarchate of Alexandria*, vol.1 (London, 1847), p.200.

<sup>10</sup> A. Neander, *General History of the Christian Religion and Church*, vol.4, tr. J. Torrey (London, 1865), p.30ff.

<sup>11</sup> A. P. Stanley, *Lectures on the History of the Eastern Church*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London, 1864), pp.222-256.

<sup>12</sup> Newman praised Athanasius as 'the royal hearted,' 'the great theologian,' 'the champion of truth' and 'the courageous heart.' Cf. J. H. Newman, *Lyra Apostolica* (Derby, 1836), p.109; Preface to *Select Treatises of St. Athanasius in Controversy with the Arians*, vol.1, (London, 1881), p.vi; *Apologia Pro Vita Sua: Being a History of His Religious Opinions* (London, 1882), p.26; and *Catholic Sermons of Cardinal Newman* (London, 1957), p.121. For relationship of Newman and Athanasius, see G. D. Dragas, 'Conscience and Tradition: Newman and Athanasius in the Orthodox Church,' *Internationale Cardinal Newman Studien*, Elfte Folge, Nürnberg, 1980; reprinted in *Ath*, pp.175-186.

<sup>13</sup> J. Kaye, *Some Account of the Council of Nicaea: In Connexion with the Life of Athanasius* (London, 1853), pp.150-151.

<sup>14</sup> F. Fialon, *Saint Athanase* (Paris, 1877), pp.104-110.

<sup>15</sup> W. Bright, Introduction to *St. Athanasius' Orations against the Arians* (Oxford, 1873), pp.i-xcviii; 'Athanasius,' *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, vol.1 (London, 1877), pp.179-203; Introduction to *the Historical Writings of St. Athanasius* (Oxford, 1881), pp.ix-xcvii; and *Lessons from the Lives of Three Great Fathers* (London, 1891), pp.1-47.

<sup>16</sup> J. Ridgway, 'A Brief Life of S. Athanasius,' *A Discourse of S. Athanasius on the Incarnation of the Word of God*, ed. and tr. J. Ridgway (Oxford and London, 1880), pp.vii-xi.

<sup>17</sup> R. W. Bush, *St. Athanasius: His Life and Times*, The Fathers for English Readers (London, 1888), pp.89-108, 215-226.

<sup>18</sup> H. R. Reynolds, *Athanasius: His Life and Work* (London, 1889), pp.39-52, 180-188.

<sup>19</sup> F. W. Farrar, *Lives of the Fathers: Sketches of Church History in Biography*, vol.1 (Edinburgh, 1889), pp.445-571.

<sup>20</sup> Robertson, *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius*, pp.lxvi-lxviii.

<sup>21</sup> E.g. A. Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, vol.3 (Freiburg, 1890), p.695; and I. A. Dorner, *History of the Development of the Doctrine of the Person of Christ*, div.1, vol.2, tr. D. W. Simon (Edinburgh, 1862), pp.292-306, 339-346, 350-351.

<sup>22</sup> Farrar, *Lives of the Fathers*, vol.1, pp.570-571.

introduction to *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria*, Robertson wrote about the character of Athanasius, 'In the whole of our minute knowledge of his life there is a total lack of self-interest. The glory of God and the welfare of the Church absorbed him fully at all times.'<sup>23</sup>

However, from the end of the nineteenth century, this pious image of Athanasius was being challenged. The first modern scholar who broke through the silence is O. Seeck. In 1896, he questioned the veracity of Athanasius and suggested that some of the documents included in his historical records were actually forgeries.<sup>24</sup> Later, between 1904 and 1911, E. Schwartz published several studies 'Zur Geschichte des Athanasius.' There, he tried to reconstruct the history of the Arian controversy and approach the career of Athanasius critically. Under some controversial presuppositions, Athanasius was described as a power-hungry politician who had polemicised with no regard for the truth.<sup>25</sup> Both Seeck's and Schwartz's charges against Athanasius are now generally considered one-sided and have been seriously criticised.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, there were some scholars such as E. Caspar,<sup>27</sup> K. M. Setton<sup>28</sup> and W. Schneemelcher<sup>29</sup> who followed the anti-Athanasian trend laid by them in the early twentieth century. Amongst these scholars, the most influential one is H.-G. Opitz. Being a student of Schwartz, he edited a very important critical edition of most of the works of Athanasius, which reveals an attitude very similar to that of his mentor.<sup>30</sup>

Although the traditional high status of Athanasius was being challenged, many scholars in the early twentieth century still insisted on the piety of this bishop. These include, for example, F. Lauchert,<sup>31</sup> H. Ranken,<sup>32</sup> G. Bardy,<sup>33</sup> G. Florovsky<sup>34</sup> and F.

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<sup>23</sup> Robertson, *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius*, p.lxvii.

<sup>24</sup> O. Seeck, 'Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Nicänischen Konzils,' *ZKG* 17 (1896):1-71, 319-362.

<sup>25</sup> E. Schwartz, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol.3: *Zur Geschichte des Athanasius* (Berlin, 1959), p.1, 72.

<sup>26</sup> See Chapter Four part A.1 of this thesis.

<sup>27</sup> E. Caspar, *Geschichte des Papsttums von den Anfängen bis zur Höhe der Weltherrschaft*, vol.1 (Tübingen, 1930), p.182.

<sup>28</sup> K. M. Setton, *Christian Attitude towards the Emperor in the Fourth Century, especially as shown in Addresses to the Emperor* (New York, 1941; reprint, 1967), p.78.

<sup>29</sup> Although Schneemelcher has deviated from Schwartz in many areas, he followed his general critical trend and gave a very harsh judgement to Athanasius. Cf. W. Schneemelcher, 'Athanasius von Alexandrien als Theologe und als Kirchenpolitiker,' *ZNW* 43 (1950-51):242-256.

<sup>30</sup> For example, when discussing his apologetic works, Opitz said that Athanasius was 'through and through a power-hungry personality.' H.-G. Opitz, ed., *Athanasius Werke, hrsg. im Auftrage der Kirchenväter-Kommission der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, vol.2: *Die Apologien* (Berlin, 1935), pp.138-139 fn.30ff.

<sup>31</sup> F. Lauchert, *Leben des heiligen Athanasius des Grossen* (Cologne, 1911), pp.25-134.

<sup>32</sup> H. Ranken, *Saint Athanasius*, Edinburgh, 1911.

<sup>33</sup> G. Bardy, *Saint Athanase* (Paris, 1925), pp.22-50, 202-207.

<sup>34</sup> G. Florovsky, *The Eastern Fathers of the Fourth Century*, Paris, 1931; 'The Concept of Creation in Saint Athanasius,' *StP* 6 (1962):36-57; and *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View* (New York, 1968), pp.80-83.



Cayre.<sup>35</sup> For them, Athanasius is still a holy saint who fought for the truth with power from God. As Cayre described in 1927, 'His strength of soul was rendered all the more indomitable by the fact that it had a greater and more powerful source than the most richly endowed of natural faculties. He was upheld by a holy passion, the love of Christ that had inflamed him from the time of his youth.'<sup>36</sup>

These two opposing views of the personality and theology of Athanasius continued to the latter half of twentieth century, but in a less extreme and more academic manner. On the critical side, after carefully examining the *C. Gent.*, *De Incarn.* and *Or. Ar.*, E. P. Meijering concluded that what Athanasius actually wrote in his treatises merely followed his Alexandrian teachers and expressed the Christian faith in Platonic language. He indeed did nothing new.<sup>37</sup> In 1974, in the book *Politique et théologie*, A. Martin, J. M. Leroux and W. Rusch queried the traditional view of Athanasius and the Melitian schism and gave a low historical value to the writings of Athanasius.<sup>38</sup> In the following year, K. M. Girardet wrote a book questioning whether there was any bias in the so-called one-sided orthodox materials of the fourth century.<sup>39</sup> In 1981, R. C. Gregg and D. E. Groh published *Early Arianism* which M. Slusser referred to as the starting point of a new theological controversy and re-construction of Arianism.<sup>40</sup> There, the authors argued that the Arians were actually more biblical than Athanasius and questioned the categories of heresy and orthodoxy.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, T. D. Barnes reconstructed the history of the Arian controversy and portrayed Athanasius as a violent and deceitful bishop. In the book, he even called him 'a gangster.'<sup>42</sup> In this period, the most extensive discussion of the Arian controversy is R. P. C. Hanson's *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*. With the aid of the Melitian Papyri and an acute critique of the career of Athanasius, Hanson concluded in the chapter 'The Behaviour of Athanasius' that the chief causes of the unhappy controversy with Arians were 'the intrigue of Eusebius of Constantinople, the opportunism of Julius of Rome, and the misconduct of Athanasius of Alexandria, and

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<sup>35</sup> F. Cayre, *Manual of Patrology and History of Theology*, vol.1, tr. H. Howitt (Paris, Tournai and Roma, 1935), pp.336-354.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.343. The book was first published in French as *Précis de Patrologie et d'Histoire de la Théologie* in 1927.

<sup>37</sup> E. P. Meijering, *Orthodoxy and Platonism in Athanasius: Synthesis or Antithesis?* Leiden, 1968.

<sup>38</sup> A. Martin, 'Athanasie et les Mélitiens (325-335),' J. M. Leroux, 'Athanasie et la seconde phase de la crise arienne (345-373),' and W. G. Rusch, 'A la recherche de l'Athanasie historique,' *PT*, pp.31-61, 145-156, 161-177.

<sup>39</sup> K. M. Girardet, *Kaisergericht und Bischofsgericht: Studien zu den Anfängen des Donatistenstreites (313-315) und zum Prozeß des Athanasius von Alexandrien (328-346)* (Bonn, 1975), p.54.

<sup>40</sup> M. Slusser, Review of Gregg and Groh, *Early Arianism*, *ThSt* 42 (1981):684-685.

<sup>41</sup> R. C. Gregg and D. E. Groh, *Early Arianism: A View of Salvation*, London, 1981. This challenging judgement was aired in their paper four years earlier. Cf. R. C. Gregg and D. E. Groh, 'The Centrality of Soteriology in Early Arianism,' *AnThR* 59 (1977):260-278; reprinted in *StP* 15 (1984):305-316.

<sup>42</sup> T. D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (London and Cambridge, 1981), p.230.

among these three causes we must judge the last to be the most serious.<sup>43</sup> Although the attacks on the personality and theology of Athanasius are not so harsh as Schwartz in the nineteenth century, the challenges in this period are much more forceful and multidirectional than previously.

However, on the conservative side, many scholars still hold the traditional view of Athanasius with little deviation only. In his classical volumes of *Patrology*, J. Quasten described Athanasius in 1960 as 'one of the most imposing figures in all ecclesiastical history, and the most outstanding of all Alexandrian bishops.'<sup>44</sup> J. Pelikan also wrote two years later that the moral character of Athanasius was so great that 'even historians and theologians unsympathetic to orthodox beliefs are really obliged to concede the same.'<sup>45</sup> Other scholars on this side also include T. F. Torrance,<sup>46</sup> E. D. Moutsoulas,<sup>47</sup> R. E. Person,<sup>48</sup> G. D. Dragas<sup>49</sup> and V. Twomey.<sup>50</sup> When the Reformed and the Greek Orthodox first sought to find common ground and had theological dialogue with each other at Leuvenberg in 1988, the first father they approached was Athanasius. Three papers read out of four are closely related to him.<sup>51</sup> Although the piety of Athanasius is being challenged seriously in the last few decades, his status remains very high among the scholars in the traditional Christian church.

Between these two opposite views, there appears in recent decades a third party which holds a centrist position. On the one hand, they accept that Athanasius had many faults and weaknesses in his episcopal career and his historico-apologetic writings. On the other hand, their appreciation of this bishop of Alexandria is in various ways different

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<sup>43</sup> R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy, 318-381AD* (Edinburgh, 1988), p.273.

<sup>44</sup> J. Quasten, *Patrology*, vol.3: *The Golden Age of Greek Patristic Literature* (Antwerp and Utrecht, 1960), p.20.

<sup>45</sup> J. Pelikan, *The Light of the World: A Basic Image in Early Christian Thought* (New York, 1962), p.77.

<sup>46</sup> T. F. Torrance, 'Spiritus Creator: A Consideration of the Teaching of St. Athanasius and St. Basil,' *Theology in Reconstruction* (London, 1965), pp.209-228; 'The Hermeneutics of St. Athanasius,' *Ἐκκλησιαστικὸς φάρος* 52 (1970):1/446-468, 2-3/89-106, 4/237-249, 53 (1971):1/133-149; and 'Athanasius: A Study in the Foundations of Classical Theology,' *Theology in Reconciliation* (London, 1975), pp.215-266.

<sup>47</sup> E. D. Moutsoulas, 'Ὁ Μέγας Ἀθανάσιος', Athens, 1974.

<sup>48</sup> R. E. Person, *The Mode of Theological Decision at the Early Councils*, Basle, 1978.

<sup>49</sup> G. D. Dragas, 'Holy Spirit and Tradition,' *Sob 1* (1979):51-72; *Athanasiana: Essays in the Theology of St. Athanasius*, vol.1, London, 1980; and 'Athanasius Contra Apollinarem,' *Church and Theology* 6 (1985):1-609.

<sup>50</sup> V. Twomey, *Apostolikos Thronos: The Primacy of Rome as Reflected in the Church History of Eusebius and the Historico-apologetic Writings of Saint Athanasius the Great*, Münsterische Beiträge zur Theologie 49 (Münster, 1982), p.231ff.

<sup>51</sup> The three papers are T. F. Torrance's 'The Triunity of God: Athanasius, Basil, the Gregories and Didymus, Epiphanius and the Council of Constantinople,' G. D. Dragas' 'St. Athanasius on the Holy Spirit and the Trinity' and T. Koev's 'The Teaching about the Holy Trinity on the basis of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Symbol of Faith.' Cf. T. F. Torrance, ed., *Theological Dialogue between Orthodox & Reformed Churches*, vol.2, Edinburgh, 1993.



from the traditional one. Representatives of this party are W. H. C. Frend,<sup>52</sup> L. W. Barnard,<sup>53</sup> M. Tetz,<sup>54</sup> G. C. Stead,<sup>55</sup> F. M. Young<sup>56</sup> and C. Kannengiesser.<sup>57</sup> For example, while criticising Athanasius' character as hard, his methods as deplorable and portraying him as an Egyptian pharaoh, Frend appreciated the exploit of the bishop and said, 'At a distance of 1600 years one cannot withhold admiration for the genius of this leader of true heroic status of Egyptian Christianity.'<sup>58</sup> Concerning the works of Athanasius, Kannengiesser raised questions in 1982 on the authorship of *Or. Ar. 3*.<sup>59</sup> Such challenges continued in his later treatises.<sup>60</sup> However, at the same time, he praises the personality of the bishop and says, 'The Athanasius whom we know through his own writings deserves to be reevaluated as a man of great character. His spiritual resistance against abusive political power perdured over a lifetime.'<sup>61</sup>

Entering into the 1990s, the situation has not changed much. On the critical side, by comparing the Christology and cosmology of Origen, Eusebius and Athanasius, J. R. Lyman challenged in 1993 the standard interpretative dualism of philosophy and biblical

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<sup>52</sup> W. H. C. Frend, 'Athanasius as an Egyptian Leader in the Fourth Century,' *New College Bulletin* 8 (1974):20-37; reprinted in *Religion Popular and Unpopular in the Early Christian Centuries* (London, 1976), chap.XVI; and *The Rise of Christianity* (London, 1984), pp.523-543.

<sup>53</sup> L. W. Barnard, 'Some Notes on the Meletian Schism in Egypt,' *StP* 12 (1975):399-405; 'Athanasius and the Meletian Schism in Egypt,' *JEA* 59 (1975):183-189; 'Two Notes on Athanasius. 1. Athanasius' Election as Archbishop of Alexandria. 2. The Circumstances Surrounding the Encyclical Letter of the Egyptian Bishops (*Apologia Contra Arianos* 3.1-19.5),' *OCP* 41 (1975):344-356; and 'Athanasius and the Roman State,' *Latomus* 36 (1977):422-437.

<sup>54</sup> M. Tetz, 'Über nikäische Orthodoxie: Der sog. Tomus ad Antiochenos des Athanasios von Alexandrien,' *ZNW* 66 (1975):194-222; 'Athanasius von Alexandrien,' 4:333-349; 'Zur Biographie des Athanasius von Alexandrien,' *ZKG* 90 (1979):304-338; and 'Athanasius und die Einheit der Kirche. Zur ökumenischen Bedeutung eines Kirchenvaters,' *ZThK* 81 (1984):196-219.

<sup>55</sup> G. C. Stead, 'Rhetorical Method in Athanasius,' *VC* 30 (1976):121-137; 'The *Thalia* of Arius and the Testimony of Athanasius,' *JThS* NS 29 (1978):20-52; 'Atanasioi,' *Dizionario patristico e di antichità cristiane*, ed. A. Di Berardino, vol.1 (1983), pp.423-432; translation in 'Athanasius,' *EEChu* 1:93-95; and 'Freedom of the Will and the Arian Controversy,' *Platonismus und Christentum (Festschrift für Heinrich Dörrie)* (Münster, 1983), pp.245-257.

<sup>56</sup> F. M. Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, London, 1983.

<sup>57</sup> See the collection of papers in C. Kannengiesser, *Arius and Athanasius: Two Alexandrian Theologians*, Hampshire and Brookfield, 1991.

<sup>58</sup> Frend, 'Athanasius as an Egyptian Leader in the Fourth Century,' p.37.

<sup>59</sup> The reason is that the context of the *Or. Ar. 3* is in the incipient stages of the Apollinarian controversy and that it is very different from the first two orations. Cf. C. Kannengiesser, 'Athanasius of Alexandria—Three Orations against the Arians: A Reappraisal,' *StP* 17 (1982):981-995; and *Athanase d'Alexandrie évêque et écrivain*, Paris, 1983.

<sup>60</sup> For example, in his recent article on Athanasius in the *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, Kannengiesser does not mention the *Or. Ar. 3* at all. Cf. C. Kannengiesser, 'Athanasius,' *EEChr* 1:137-140. Because of the close relationship the *Or. Ar. 3* has with the *Ad Afr.* and *Ad Max.*, he rejects the authenticity of these two treatises as well. Cf. Kannengiesser, '(Ps.-) Athanasius, *Ad Afros* Examined,' pp.264-280; and 'L'énigme de la lettre au philosophe Maxime d'Athanase d'Alexandrie,' pp.261-276.

<sup>61</sup> C. Kannengiesser, 'Athanasius of Alexandria and the ascetic movement of his time,' *Asc*, p.489. Kannengiesser even portrays Athanasius as 'a paradigm for the church of today.' Cf. C. Kannengiesser, 'Athanasius of Alexandria: A Paradigm for the Church of today,' *AA*, chap.XIV; reprinted from *Pacifica* 1 (1988):85-99.

tradition in early Christian thought. Following E. P. Meijering, Lyman argues that Athanasius was not a real episcopal and ascetic teacher in a new age of Christian identity as many old scholars lauded. On the contrary, he was still unable to escape the philosophical issues of his time.<sup>62</sup> In the same year, T. D. Barnes published his second book on the history of Arian controversy. In the book, he portrays Athanasius anew as a subtle and dishonest politician who acted and wrote not for religious purpose, but purely for the benefit of himself.<sup>63</sup> Following a similar trend, D. B. Brakke wrote in 1995 his *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, which examines how Athanasius integrated the Christian ascetic movement into the wider church both institutionally and philosophically. For Brakke, Athanasius is not a real ascetic. His ascetic program of self-formation is actually 'a political programme of church formation.'<sup>64</sup>

Responding to such accusations on Athanasius, D. W.-H. Arnold re-examined the early episcopal career of Athanasius in 1991 and concluded, 'There is far less evidence for the violent and duplicitous character of Athanasius than might be supposed from a cursory reading of Hanson, Barnes, or the other current critics.'<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, A. Pettersen also authored two books on the conservative side.<sup>66</sup> Besides defending the theology of Athanasius, he also wrote concerning his life positively. Contrasting with Barnes, Pettersen believes that Athanasius acted and wrote mainly for a religious purpose. As he wrote in an introduction, 'Seventeen years, out of forty-six as bishop, Athanasius had spent in exile. Politics and theology had ever intermingled. So Athanasius lived, defending his understanding of the Catholic faith, as declared at Nicaea.'<sup>67</sup> With similar conviction, P. Widdicombe compared the theology of Origen and Athanasius and concluded, 'Writing under the pressure of the Arian challenge, Athanasius saw his primary task as securing the divine status of the Son as the basis of salvation.'<sup>68</sup> The bishop is believed to be a real defender of the orthodox doctrines. In 1998, K. Anatolios published a book attempting to prove the coherence of Athanasius' theological system. While certain modern scholars have proposed that the bishop was a

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<sup>62</sup> For Lyman, both Origen, Eusebius and Athanasius borrowed and modified common formulae of late antiquity to express particular theological concerns. Cf. J. R. Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology: Models of Divine Activity in Origen, Eusebius and Athanasius*, Oxford, 1993.

<sup>63</sup> T. D. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire*, Cambridge and London, 1993.

<sup>64</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, p.266. This book is a revision of his doctoral thesis 'St. Athanasius and Ascetic Christians in Egypt,' Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1992.

<sup>65</sup> D. W.-H. Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity 6 (Notre Dame and London, 1991), p.183.

<sup>66</sup> The two books are A. Pettersen, *Athanasius and the Human Body*, Bristol, 1990; and *Athanasius*, Outstanding Christian Thinkers series, London, 1995.

<sup>67</sup> Pettersen, *Athanasius*, p.18.

<sup>68</sup> P. Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius*, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford, 1994), p.250.

supporter of the ‘heretical’ Λόγος-σάρξ Christology, Anatolios tried to re-evaluate the problem and defend against this challenge for him.<sup>69</sup>

Although more and more information has been collected and analysed, our understanding of the character of Athanasius is very limited. There is still much to learn concerning the life and career of this controversial bishop. It seems that a generally agreed conclusion on this issue will not be achieved easily and that the debate among these scholars is far from over.

## **B. A Proposed Solution—The Spirituality of Athanasius**

As seen from the above survey, the study of Athanasius is truly a controversial and challenging task. What is the key problem constituting this confused situation? As a matter of fact, the Alexandrian bishop has been mainly approached in the last few decades on the level of the general imperial and ecclesiastical context of his time. Unfortunately, as D. W.-H. Arnold points out, although Athanasius is a prolific writer on theological, polemical, and pastoral themes, little biographical information emerges. Many historians, both early and contemporary, based their accounts of the fourth-century political combats largely upon those of Athanasius himself and may, therefore, present a rather narrow perspective. On the other hand, the extant fragments of Philostorgius and the Arian reports included in the works of Sozomen and Epiphanius are far from impartial and may present an equally constrained point of view.<sup>70</sup> Nearly all Athanasius’ writings, as well as other records that report the events, seem to be composed for a particular point of view. Because of this reason, it is nearly impossible at this moment to extract a purer historical narrative of Athanasius without subjective judgements.<sup>71</sup> It is for the same reason that we do not have a conclusive biography of the bishop, and that various, or even opposite, views towards him are found amongst scholars.

As our extant historical records are so problematic, unless new and decisive materials emerge, it seems that no commonly agreed conclusion about the real picture of Athanasius can be reached if the present way of study continues. To understand the Alexandrian bishop properly, we must have another key to unlock the puzzle. Here, our proposal is through his spirituality, a theme that has long been ignored. Instead of evaluating Athanasius externally from the debatable imperial and ecclesiastical context, this study seeks to understand him from his personal inner convictions. Instead of treating

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<sup>69</sup> K. Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought*, London and New York, 1998.

<sup>70</sup> Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, p.3.

<sup>71</sup> Nearly all historians who claim to have reconstructed the history of Athanasius cannot escape from questionable subjective judgements. For a discussion of the historiographical method of modern Athanasian scholars, see Chapter Four part A of this thesis.

him singly as a historical figure in the fourth-century controversy, we try to study his spirituality in different directions, including his cultural background, theological conviction, ascetic teachings, and personal behaviour. In the past, scholars usually just studied Athanasius in a particular angle, historical or dogmatic. As a result, he was narrowly, and often partially, presented. By evaluating him widely in different angles, we hope to achieve a fairer judgement and give a fuller picture of the bishop.

As a natural reaction against the stunting effects of the prevailing secularism, people nowadays have an increasing hunger for some experience of God or the Absolute in their lives.<sup>72</sup> A great many dissertations, books, essays and articles have been written on it. A browse of the recent works on this subject will find that their quantity is surprisingly numerous and their concerns are extremely various. While some concentrate on the nature of spirituality itself, many others discuss the subject in an interdisciplinary manner. Whilst some try to retrace its form and character in history, many have analysed its function and behaviour in modern society. While some still focus their attention on traditional Christian denominations, many have now extended their views to different social groups, different geographical areas and different religions. It seems that research on spirituality is becoming more and more vigorous and its influence in the modern world is considerable.

With regard to the historical investigation of spirituality in the Christian world, we may find a lot of studies on popular church leaders such as Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin and Wesley. However, although some scholars regard Athanasius as the founder of the fourth-century spirituality in the Christian church, his spirituality is still an area of little research.<sup>73</sup> Although his *Vita Antonii* has long been treated as a classic of Christian spirituality, few scholars have attempted a thorough discussion of the spirituality of its author.<sup>74</sup> People usually examine the spirituality of the *Vita Antonii* only, but neglect other works of Athanasius.<sup>75</sup> Although he has great influence on early monasticism, few scholars have achieved detailed research on his ascetic theology. People often focus their attention on monasticism itself or on Athanasius' politics in relation to the monks only,

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<sup>72</sup> For the action and reaction of secularism after the Enlightenment and how it has catalysed people's longing for spiritual things, see T. Tastard, 'Theology and Spirituality in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,' *CETh*, pp.594-619.

<sup>73</sup> For example, Kannengiesser says, 'Athanasius was the founder of what may be called the fourth-century spirituality in the Christian church. His view of God seems to ignore the Gnostic pattern of theological inquiry refined and promoted by Origen until half a century before him in the Alexandrian church.' C. Kannengiesser, 'The Spiritual Message of the Great Fathers,' *CSp* 1:63.

<sup>74</sup> For a discussion of the authorship of the *Vita Antonii*, see Chapter Three part A.1 of this thesis.

<sup>75</sup> Pourrat, Bouyer and Jones all have included a section in their books on Antony, but none on Athanasius. Cf. P. Pourrat, *Christian Spirituality*, vol.1: *From the Time of our Lord till the Dawn of the Middle Ages*, tr. W. H. Mitchell and S. P. Jacques, London, 1922; L. Bouyer, *A History of Christian Spirituality*, vol.1: *The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers*, tr. M. P. Ryan, London, 1963; and C. Jones, G. Wainwright and E. Yarnold, ed., *The Study of Spirituality*, London, 1986.



but overlook the personal spirituality of its promoter.<sup>76</sup> The only two weighty articles specifically discussing the spirituality of Athanasius are both written by G. Bardy. One is his entry on Athanasius in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*.<sup>77</sup> Another is 'La vie spirituelle d'après saint Athanase' in *La Vie Spirituelle*.<sup>78</sup> Both are works of more than half a century ago. Although L. R. Wickham has also written an entry on Athanasius' spirituality in the *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* not long ago, the discussion is too short and simple, so that its usefulness is very limited.<sup>79</sup> Being long ignored, the spirituality of Athanasius is a subject highly in need of fresh exploration.

## 1. The Definition of Spirituality

What is spirituality? This is a question we must answer first before doing anything. Not long ago, the word 'spirituality' was not so popular outside Christian circles.<sup>80</sup> Nowadays, the word has been widely used in different communities. Some will even talk of humanist spirituality or Marxist spirituality. As Kinerk says, the word now 'enjoys an unlimited wealth of resources but possesses no tools for getting those resources organised.'<sup>81</sup> We must confess that 'spirituality' is a difficult word with a wide and vague significance. A clear universal definition of the word is not easy.<sup>82</sup> Basically, the word 'spirituality' originated from the Latin word *spiritualitas* which has its root meaning from the Greek noun πνεῦμα and its adjective πνευματικός as they appear in the New Testament Pauline letters. Instead of contrasting with physical or material, the word meant a kind of good manifesting the Spirit of God. Its opposite meaning was fleshly and earthly.<sup>83</sup> It was not until the middle ages that the anti-material senses were added onto the word. In modern language, the word first emerged in French in the seventeenth century where it mainly referred to affective relationships with God. However, the use of the word declined in reaction to its unorthodox associations. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the word reappeared in France again. The present word in English was

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<sup>76</sup> A good example is Brakke's thesis on Athanasius' relationship with monasticism. Cf. Brakke, 'St. Athanasius and Ascetic Christians in Egypt.'

<sup>77</sup> G. Bardy, 'Athanase,' *Dictionnaire de la spiritualité*, vol.1 (Paris, 1937), col.1047-1052.

<sup>78</sup> G. Bardy, 'La vie spirituelle d'après saint Athanase,' *La Vie Spirituelle* 18 (1928):97-113.

<sup>79</sup> L. R. Wickham, 'Athanasius of Alexandria, St.,' *DCS*, pp.32-33.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. S. Tugwell, *Ways of Imperfection: An Exploration of Christian Spirituality* (London, 1984), p.vii.

<sup>81</sup> E. Kinerk, 'Towards a method for the study of spirituality,' *Review for Religious* 40 (1981):3.

<sup>82</sup> Schneiders has summarised the difficulties of defining the word 'spirituality' into two points: 1) as a discipline on lived experience, the term, like 'psychology,' is unavoidably ambiguous; 2) the term has undergone an astounding expansion in the last few decades. Cf. S. M. Schneiders, 'Spirituality in the Academy,' *ThSt* 50 (1989):678. See also C. M. N. Eire, 'Major Problems in the Definition of Spirituality as an Academic Discipline,' *MCS*, pp.53-61.

<sup>83</sup> Rom. 8:14; 1 Cor. 13 and Gal. 5:25. The Latin word *spiritualitas* was first found in a fifth-century letter where its use is close to what Paul means by πνευματικός. Cf. C. J. H. Hingley, 'Spirituality,' *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology*, ed. D. J. Atkinson and D. H. Field (Leicester and Downers Grove, 1995), pp.807-809.

chiefly passed on from the translation of French writings. It meant the clergy or the ecclesiastical office and had a strong religious sense in its original use.<sup>84</sup> With the gradual separation of spirituality and dogma, and the increasing internalisation of the term, 'spirituality' has now gradually shifted away from its Christian origin. Besides, its content also changed from an abstract and static sense as spiritual theology into a more inclusive and dynamic form. In the past, it was considered as equivalent to 'ascetic and mystical theology' or 'spiritual theology.' Now, it has become an enormous subject with meanings much wider than these two terms.<sup>85</sup>

Today, not just Christianity uses 'spirituality' to describe one's transcendental experience of God in Christ, but other religions also employ it to express one's interiority under their own contexts. P. Sheldrake has summarised the characteristic of spirituality in the last two decades into four points. Firstly, it is neither exclusive to any one Christian tradition, nor even to Christianity as a whole. Secondly, it is not simply the prescriptive application of absolute or dogmatic principles to life. Thirdly, it does not so much concern itself with defining perfection as with surveying the complex mystery of human growth in the context of a living relationship with the Absolute. Finally, it is not limited to a concern with the interior life but seeks an integration of all aspects of human life and experience.<sup>86</sup> Under this new situation, spirituality can now no longer be treated as a single transcultural phenomenon but has become rooted in transcendental experiences that are framed by the specific and contingent histories and contexts of individuals and communities. Because of this, scholars nowadays either refuse to define the word<sup>87</sup> or just define it with such an empty statement as 'an interdisciplinary subject that is concerned with the specifically "spiritual" dimension of human existence.'<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* gives four definitions to the word: 1) The body of Spiritual or ecclesiastical persons; the clergy; 2) That which has a spiritual character; ecclesiastical property or revenue held or received in return for spiritual services; 3) The quality or condition of being spiritual; 4) The fact of condition of being spirit or of consisting of an incorporeal essence. Cf. C. T. Onions, ed., 'Spirituality,' *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford, 1933), 2:1973.

<sup>85</sup> For fuller surveys of the history of the word, see B. McGinn, 'The Letter and the Spirit: Spirituality as an Academic Discipline,' *Christian Spirituality Bulletin* 1.2 (1993):1-10; P. Sheldrake, 'Spirituality and Theology,' *CETh*, pp.515-516; P. Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History: Questions of Interpretation and Method*, revised ed. (London, 1995), chap.2; Schneiders, 'Spirituality in the Academy,' pp.680-684; W. Principe, 'Toward Defining Spirituality,' *Studies in Religion* 12 (1983):130-135; and C. Jones, 'Note on Spirituality,' *The Study of Spirituality*, ed. C. Jones et al. (London, 1986), pp.xxiv-xxvi.

<sup>86</sup> Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History*, p.58.

<sup>87</sup> As the new edition of *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* writes, 'The term has come into very widespread use in many languages during the 20th cent., though its meaning has not been satisfactorily defined.' 'Spirituality,' *ODCC*, pp.1532-1533.

<sup>88</sup> Sheldrake, 'Spirituality and Theology,' p.514. Compared with its definition in *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* a decade ago, the meaning of spirituality has become more and more vague. There, spirituality was defined as 'a word which has come into vogue to describe those attitudes, beliefs, practices, which animate people's lives and help them to reach out towards supersensible realities.' G. Wakefield, 'Spirituality,' *DCS*, pp.361.

Although the word 'spirituality' originated within Christianity, Christian spirituality has surprisingly become a distinct academic discipline only in relatively recent times. In the patristic period, theology was not a purely abstract subject separated from actual practice, but was a process of interpreting the Scriptures on different levels with the aim of deepening the Christian life in all dimensions. Rather than as a distinct area of knowledge, spirituality, which was at that time talking about one's relation with God, is in the very heart of patristic theology. For the church fathers, theology and spirituality are basically inseparable.<sup>89</sup> However, because of the increasing division of affectivity and conceptual knowledge, spirituality was gradually detached from theology in the middle ages. Besides, its concentration on interiority also caused it to separate from public liturgy and from ethics. Further, because the growth of scientific inquiry during the period of the Enlightenment has intensified the split between spirituality and the various branches of theology, an independent distinct discipline of spirituality has been consequently constituted and has become more and more popular today.<sup>90</sup>

Following traditional views of different denominations, spirituality in Christianity has from the start had its own content and fields of discussion. However, Christian spirituality has also undergone revolutionary change in the last few decades. Not just the spiritual tradition of every single denomination has been influenced by the ecumenical movement of the recent age, but the whole concept of spirituality is being reviewed in the Christian world.<sup>91</sup> Besides the shift of contemporary spirituality in general, the traditional perspective of Christian spirituality has also been challenged by the non-biblical individualism and the re-interpretation of Christianity.<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, the modern critical approach of interpreting history does also force people to reconsider the formulation of the concept of piety in the church.<sup>93</sup> It seems that the scope and content of Christian spirituality are still changing. However, we may still identify some specific features of it. On the one hand, it has a relatively definite and universal belief. As Christianity is essentially a monotheistic religion based on the Holy Scriptures, Christian spirituality

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<sup>89</sup> As A. Meredith says, 'Nowadays we are accustomed to make a distinction between what we call theology and spirituality... This dichotomy would have been quite unintelligible to the Fathers. For them it was impossible to be a good theologian unless one were living a moral life.' A. Meredith, 'Patristic spirituality,' *CETH*, p.555.

<sup>90</sup> For the reasons of the separation of spirituality from theology, see Sheldrake, 'Spirituality and Theology,' pp.517-518. For a discussion of the history of this separation, see Appendix A of this thesis.

<sup>91</sup> For a fuller discussion of the influence of ecumenical movement to Christian spirituality, see D. E. Saliers, 'Christian Spirituality in an Ecumenical Age,' *CSp* 3:520-544.

<sup>92</sup> These two terms are employed by Garner. Non-biblical individualism here means a privatisation of religion and re-interpretation of Christianity means a rejection and elimination of the supernatural. Cf. C. Garner, 'What on earth is spirituality?' *Can Spirituality be taught?* ed. J. Robson and D. Lonsdale (Nottingham, 1987), p.5.

<sup>93</sup> The definition of piety is created and controlled by the majority of the clergy. The minority and the laity are usually oppressed. For a fuller discussion on this issue, see Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History*, chap.3.

fundamentally focuses on the communion one has with God in Christ through the Holy Spirit and the ways in which that communion is initiated, maintained and improved. On the other hand, it is based on actual lived experience and is always grounded in a particular context. It is closely linked with religious psychology, social culture and many other related disciplines.<sup>94</sup> Besides, Christian spirituality also has many paradoxical dimensions. It emphasises the interior life as well as exterior behaviour. It is personal as well as communal. It has private elements like prayer, contemplation and scripture reading. It also has public components like sacraments and liturgy. Being a discipline in Christianity, it is intimately tied with theology and morality.<sup>95</sup>

Under these understandings, we may define 'the spirituality of Athanasius' as the religious conviction expressed in his interior life and exterior behaviour under the influence of communal belief and personal experience. Both the sayings and deeds of the bishop are materials we cannot ignore in our study of his spirituality. In addition to orthodox doctrine, experiential and contextual factors should be thoroughly considered as well. We cannot crudely equate his spirituality with that of the community to which he belongs. When talking about the spirituality of Athanasius, we cannot simply study the Alexandrian Christian tradition, or the monastic trend in the fourth-century Egypt, but should see him as a particular individual. All factors affecting the formation of his personal spirituality, and all his responses to these factors should be considered simultaneously.

## **2. The Approaches to Athanasius' Spirituality**

Very naturally, the first approach to Athanasius' spirituality is from his personal background. Since spirituality is largely moulded from external factors like growth experience, social culture and communal belief, a good knowledge of these things can surely help us in understanding the spirituality of the Alexandrian bishop. However, when studying in this direction, three problems will immediately emerge. First, we only have very little information about the childhood of Athanasius. Except that he had close

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<sup>94</sup> A. E. McGrath has tried to define 'Christian Spirituality' in his 1999 issue, which shows clearly the combination of these two elements. Here he writes, 'Christian spirituality concerns the quest for a fulfilled and authentic Christian existence, involving the bringing together of the fundamental ideas of Christianity and the whole experience of living on the basis of and within the scope of the Christian faith.' A. E. McGrath, *Christian Spirituality—An Introduction* (Oxford, 1999), p.2.

<sup>95</sup> Concerning the specific features of contemporary Christian spirituality, Sheldrake summarised in 1995, 'In Christian terms, "spirituality" relates to how people subjectively appropriate traditional beliefs about God, the human person, creation, and their inter-relationship, and then express these in worship, basic values and life-style. Thus, spirituality is the whole of human life viewed in terms of a conscious relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, through the indwelling of the Spirit and within the community of believers. As an area of study, "spirituality" examines this dimension of human existence from historical, phenomenological and theological standpoints.' Sheldrake, 'Spirituality and Theology,' p.514. See also E. H. Cousins, 'What is Christian Spirituality?' *MCS*, pp.39-44.



relationship with Alexander, and possibly also with Antony,<sup>96</sup> no other definite influences from his personal growth experience can be named. Second, since Alexandria was a key metropolis in the Roman Empire, many different cultures and thoughts might be found there. The effect of social culture on the formation of Athanasius' spirituality is extremely complex and very difficult to discern. Third, although Athanasius constantly belonged to the same religious community, the Origenist tradition had clearly been changed to a certain extent by his predecessor(s). Since very few writings of Alexander survive, the influence of communal belief is again hard to define. Of course, it is still important for us to understand the personal background of Athanasius. However, because of the above three problems, the findings from this approach are very limited, and certainly far from decisive. Most of them can just be treated as auxiliary supporting evidences only.

As it is ineffective to explore Athanasius' spirituality from a study of external formative factors, we must turn our attention to his internal responses. Such responses may be divided into two types: in actions and in words. Responses in actions basically mean one's life and deeds in history. Since spirituality is something about one's deepest conviction, it is very easy and natural to be expressed in external behaviours. Even those who are used to act hypocritically can usually be 'known' through long observations of their life. By studying the historical life of Athanasius, his spirituality can theoretically be revealed as well. Unfortunately, as stated before, the real picture of the historical Athanasius is still under scholarly debate. Again, we find that we cannot begin our study in this approach. Instead of deducing spirituality from historical life, the genuine picture of the historical Athanasius is to be confirmed and clarified by our understanding of his spirituality.

The last possible approach to probe the spirituality of Athanasius is through his responses in words, which primarily mean his sayings and writings. Amongst various messages, the most direct and relevant one is obviously his spiritual teachings. Through transmitting his spiritual ideals, the bishop taught people how to live according to their religion. Unfortunately, Athanasius' spiritual teachings themselves are equally problematic. As more and more scholars have emphasised the propagandising effects of Athanasius' writings in the Arian controversy, the sincerity of his teachings has become a doubtful matter.<sup>97</sup> We do not know exactly from the available texts what are intended and what are ingenuous. Also, we cannot say precisely which parts of his teachings reflect his own specific personal spirituality and which parts represent general social spiritual

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<sup>96</sup> For a discussion of the relationship between Antony and Athanasius, see Chapter Three part A.2 of this thesis.

<sup>97</sup> Such scholars include E. Schwartz, A. Martin, J. M. Leroux, W. Rusch, T. D. Barnes and D. B. Brakke. For more details of their arguments, see part A of this introduction.

traditions of his time. Indeed, even Athanasius himself may not be able to distinguish them so consciously. Although he has composed many spiritual treatises, because of the suspicion of propaganda and duplicity, we cannot unconditionally accept and use them in our study either. Of course, it is still important for us to study his spiritual teachings. However, they can function as supplementary evidences only.

To explore the inner spirituality of Athanasius, we must base our study on something more solid and reliable. So, instead of the doubtful spiritual teachings, we start our research with another class of responses in words. That is his theology. Apparently, amongst various sayings and writings, only this is commonly agreed to be his own. As the whole episcopal life of Athanasius was immersed in the fourth-century theological polemic, his theology is very crucial and fundamental in his spirituality. Although the relationship between spirituality and theology is an unsettled issue nowadays, their dissolution started only in the High Middle Ages. In the early church, theology was the written presentation of an outlook that involved spirituality. The two were primarily inseparable and belonged to the same enterprise.<sup>98</sup>

### **C. Methodology and Limitations**

Since spirituality has now become an enormous interdisciplinary subject of which the scope may be endless, we must limit our research with some criteria so that our discussion may be focused. Here in our study, topics are selected based on two basic criteria. Firstly, the topic is crucial for our mastery of Athanasian spirituality. It can give us the most fundamental principles of the thoughts and deeds of the bishop. Secondly, it is predominant and special amongst the spiritual messages of Athanasius. Preferably, it can guide us to find out the significance of his spirituality in the contemporary social and cultural contexts. Because of these two criteria, topics like sacraments, liturgy, prayer and interpretation of the Scriptures will not be discussed separately though they are all very important in the history of Christian spirituality. All these topics will be touched on only when it is necessary and relevant.

As seen from the above discussion, the exploration of the spirituality of Athanasius is truly a difficult task. While all other approaches to this subject are apparently shut, theology seems to be the only workable point from which we can begin our study. Nevertheless, because of the suspicion of duplicity, our findings from his doctrinal writings cannot be conclusive either. They must be compared with other information, such as his personal background, frequently in order to firmly establish their creditability. In Chapter One, we will examine his theological system, explore his spirituality through

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<sup>98</sup> For a historical survey of the relationship between spirituality and theology, see Appendix A of this thesis.

it, and then find out the theological base of his spiritual teachings. Since the formation of Athanasius' spirituality, as well as his theology, was determined by many factors, particularly the teachings of his predecessors, they will be analysed first at the beginning of our study.

Based on the findings in the first chapter, the ascetic teachings of Athanasius will be analysed in Chapter Two. Amongst the spiritual teachings of Athanasius, asceticism is the predominant one. Because of this, two doctoral theses were specifically prepared on this topic in the last decade.<sup>99</sup> In addition, in the special publication on asceticism in 1995, an independent essay on Athanasius' relation with the ascetic and monastic movement of his time is included. There, Athanasius is said to be 'the first authority in the Christian church who recognised the importance of monasticism for the Christian way of life.'<sup>100</sup> The high status of asceticism in Athanasius' teachings, as well as his great influence on monastic movements, is undeniable. In addition to basic principles on asceticism, this chapter will also include Athanasius' general advice for the whole congregation and special advice for the female virgins and the desert monks.

Amongst the spiritual writings of Athanasius, the most important and influential is the *Vita Antonii*. Concerning this treatise, R. C. Gregg remarks, 'It enjoyed broad circulation among literate members of the Church, presumably was read to others, and quickly was made available in translation to those who did not read Greek.'<sup>101</sup> Within a few decades, it had won broad acclaim amongst Christians of different areas and different languages.<sup>102</sup> The extensive impact of this hagiography on the readers may be imagined. Concerning the rank of the *V. Ant.* in Athanasius' ascetic writings, D. B. Brakke applauds that this work was 'the crowning achievement' of Athanasius' effort to articulate asceticism.<sup>103</sup> In Chapter Three, the messages of this weighty spiritual work of Athanasius will be analysed specifically. Since the authorship and the nature of the hagiography, as well as the relationship between Antony and Athanasius, are still under debate, these issues will be discussed first.

In the final chapter, the spirituality of Athanasius will be put back into the living context and its influences on his career and the Arian controversy will be probed. This chapter is different from the previous three in that, while others are mainly inductive in

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<sup>99</sup> C. M. Badger, 'The New Man Created in God: Christology, Congregation and Asceticism in Athanasius of Alexandria,' Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1990; Brakke, 'St. Athanasius and Ascetic Christians in Egypt.'

<sup>100</sup> Kannengiesser, 'Athanasius of Alexandria and the ascetic movement of his time,' p.479.

<sup>101</sup> R. C. Gregg, ed. and tr., *Athanasius: The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York, 1980), p.2.

<sup>102</sup> As Chadwick describes, by 400 Antony was already a hero of the past. Cf. O. Chadwick, *John Cassian* (Cambridge, 1950), pp.13-15.

<sup>103</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, p.270.

nature, it has more deductive elements. In the first three chapters, the personal spirituality and ascetic teachings of Athanasius are explored and evaluated step by step from his writings. In the last chapter, the outcomes of the previous chapters are applied into the actual historical situation and their major influences on his life are deduced. Since the whole episcopacy of Athanasius was merged with the Arian controversy, and his theologico-spiritual teachings and historico-apologetic situation frequently interacted with each other, it is very reasonable for us to re-evaluate the character of Athanasius through our renewed understanding of his spirituality. Here, we will try to do this with the hope of helping to solve the confused situation of modern Athanasian studies. It is indeed the most substantial part in our study. Before proceeding into our analysis on how the bishop actualised his own spiritual ideal into his life and career, modern discussions on his personality and character will be reviewed and examined first.

As stated before, the trustworthiness of our extant historical sources and that of Athanasius' spiritual teachings are now being questioned. When using them in our study, regular assessments of their validity and creditability are needed. In this thesis, two questions are asked frequently: Is the message or record consistent and coherent with the spirituality expressed in Athanasius' theology? Is it matching and resonant with his personal experience, the relevant religious tradition and the contemporary social culture? If a spiritual message is consistent with his theology and can be supported by corresponding historical backgrounds, we may say with more confidence that it is for the bishop something of intense personal conviction. The possibility of duplicity is small. Similarly, the coherence with his spirituality may be treated as one of the factors helping us to determine whether a historical record about Athanasius is trustworthy or not.

Since the subject of spirituality is so broad and the life and writings of Athanasius are so complex, the scope of our topic 'The Spirituality of Athanasius' is considerable. We must therefore confess our limitations. Based on his chief achievements, nearly all scholars have focused their attentions on Athanasius in three different directions: his theology in a metaphysical approach, his controversy with Arians in a historical prospect and his promotion of monasticism with the *V. Ant.*. All these subjects are extensive and complicated. While our present study cannot hope to provide a thorough discussion on the relationship between them, it can attempt to open up a horizontal path of spirituality across these three vertical highways of his achievements. A comprehensive discussion of every aspect relating to Athanasius is far beyond the target of our study. At the end, I think we must emphasise again here our two criteria of selecting materials stated before. This means that not all things under our topic will be included, but only those relevant and important are chosen. It can be argued that the selection process may be quite subjective. However, as a first attempt of research on a relatively new large topic, such selection of materials seems to be unavoidable.



# I. SPIRITUALITY AND THEOLOGY

In the minds of most church fathers, spirituality and theology are inseparable and belong to the same enterprise. They are and must be intimately related.<sup>1</sup> While spirituality is the inner belief and reality of theology, theology is in turn its outward expression. For this reason, theology, which represents one's own spirituality, is the underlying ground for all spiritual teachings. Spiritual practices are the actualisation of theological conviction in earthly life. In order to investigate the spirituality of Athanasius, an overview of his theology, especially soteriology, is necessary. By comparing his early and late works, we can see that the theology of Athanasius is basically consistent, though minor shifts in emphasis due to situational change can be discerned. For example, in his early works he just emphasised the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit was seldom mentioned. However after the controversy with the 'Tropici' (οἱ Τροπικοὶ),<sup>2</sup> he referred to the Third person of the Triad more frequently. As Athanasius' theology is a large subject, so that even a separate thesis would be insufficient to discuss it thoroughly, what will be included here is limited to those themes directly related to the formation of his spiritual teachings.

## A. Formation of Theological System from Personal Spirituality

Since spirituality and theology are intimately linked together, to understand the theology of Athanasius, we must first examine the factors affecting his personal spirituality and see how the formation of doctrinal system was influenced by them. Concerning his theological system, because of the limitation of space, only two doctrines which are key for our understanding of the whole system will be discussed in this section. The first one is the Trinitarian theology, which is the controlling theme forcing Athanasius to give up some important teachings in the Origenist tradition, such as the pre-existence of souls. The second one is the doctrine of creation, which is the background and base of all other doctrinal themes.

### 1. Factors moulding Athanasius' Spirituality

The formation of one's spirituality is a complex issue in which numerous factors such as personal experience, religious tradition and historical culture are involved. Athanasius' spirituality and theology cannot be understood without some knowledge of

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A of this thesis.

<sup>2</sup> 'Tropici' is a name which Athanasius called his opponents. Their actual identity is not totally clear. According to Athanasius' *Ad Serap.*, it seems that they held a doctrine of the creaturehood of the Holy Spirit while accepting the perfect divinity of the Son. They formed probably after the rudimentary settlement of the Arian controversy in the early 360s.

these factors. Moulded in a multicultural society, Athanasius' spirituality was stimulated and influenced by a number of thoughts. These thoughts include for example the Jewish spirituality in the Second Temple period, the contemplative ideals of the Greek philosophers and the emphases of mystical union with God in the early Christian community. Amongst various ancient thoughts, the most crucial and immediate factor affecting the spiritual concepts of Athanasius is the teachings of the earlier fathers, particularly his Alexandrian predecessors Clement, Origen and Alexander.

Concerning the cultural background of Clement, S. R. C. Lilla suggests that his system represents the meeting-point of three distinct streams: the Jewish-Alexandrine philosophy, the Platonic tradition and Gnosticism. Clement interprets Christianity in terms of this cultural background and combines them together.<sup>3</sup> He adopts many contemporary philosophical mystical themes such as divine unknowability and deification into his thought. However, as B. McGinn observes, he also maintains that the soul (ψυχή) is not naturally divine and gnosis (γνῶσις) is not a precondition for salvation.<sup>4</sup> For Clement, the incarnate Λόγος has two important functions which informed the whole of his soteriology. Being the Saviour of the human race, He bestows new life to every believer, which is essential to all Christian efforts. For this reason, faith (πίστις) which proceeds to knowledge (γνῶσις) and contemplation (θεωρία) is fundamental to salvation.<sup>5</sup> Besides, being the divine reason, the incarnate Λόγος also manifested God on earth in such a way that men may know through His example how to walk on the way to God.<sup>6</sup> Clement divides Christians into the Gnostics and the simple believers. Although both can be saved, the former who have special gnosis from Christ are more perfect and superior.<sup>7</sup> They have attained vision of God (θεωρία Θεοῦ) with pure hearts, and may become god-like by the practice of virtue and charity through their love of God and of their fellows.<sup>8</sup> For Clement, the goal of life is divine contemplation.<sup>9</sup> On that account, J. Quasten calls him 'the founder of speculative theology.'<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> S. R. C. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism* (Oxford, 1971), pp.227-234.

<sup>4</sup> B. McGinn, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, vol.1: *The Foundation of Mysticism* (London, 1991), p.102.

<sup>5</sup> Clement, *Stromata* 2.4.15, 4.18.114 (GCS 15, p.120, 298).

<sup>6</sup> Clement, *Stromata* 5.12.82 (GCS 15, pp.380-381); *Cohortatio ad Gentes* 1.8.1 (GCS 12, p.8).

<sup>7</sup> Clement, *Stromata* 7.14.84 (GCS 17, p.60).

<sup>8</sup> Clement, *Stromata* 7.3.13, 7.16.101-102 (GCS 17, p.10, 71-72).

<sup>9</sup> Clement, *Stromata* 1.25.166 (GCS 15, pp.103-104).

<sup>10</sup> J. Quasten, *Patrology*, vol.2: *The Ante-Nicene Literature after Irenaeus* (Antwerp and Utrecht, 1953), p.20.

Deeply inspired by Clement, Origen also integrated Greek philosophical ideas into Christian theology.<sup>11</sup> Eusebius described him as a serious ascetic who persisted in the philosophic way of life (βίω φιλοσοφωτάτῳ) and devoted most of the night to the study of the Scriptures.<sup>12</sup> According to Origen, God has two creations. The first spiritual creation was composed of 'minds' which were created according to the Λόγος, the true Image. They lived a joyful contemplative life with God.<sup>13</sup> The second creation relates to the ethereal body, which was 'materialised' in the fall. These two creations are logically distinct, but chronologically simultaneous. In the fallen condition, the human πνεῦμα has become inert and the ψυχή was 'cooled' in its love of God.<sup>14</sup> Instead of through the intelligible world, truth is now mainly accessible through spiritual exegesis of the revealed Scriptures, which has been made achievable by the indwelling of the Λόγος.<sup>15</sup> In the mind of Origen, the incarnate Λόγος has two momentous functions. On the one hand, He serves as a divine model. Through his loving and contemplative life, Jesus educates human souls and awakes their spirits to divine reality. On the other hand, He acts as an intermediate medium through which men may contemplate and return to God.<sup>16</sup> The central motif Origen used for the return of the human soul is that of the spiritual journey to God, in which perfection is achieved through divine contemplation and ascetic practice. As H. Crouzel says, 'For Origen every "going up" mentioned in the holy books...symbolises a spiritual ascent, and every "going down" a decline.'<sup>17</sup> Instead of Clement's 'Gnostic,' Origen calls the advanced believers who possess the gnosis of Christ the 'spiritual' (πνευματικός) and 'perfect' (τέλειος) Christians. Here, one should note that this Origenist mystical gnosis is, as B. McGinn observes, both intellectual and affective, and both noetic and erotic.<sup>18</sup> Certainly, after the efforts of Clement and Origen, most Alexandrian Christians would have become accustomed to seeing contemplation of God and ascetic practice as means of spiritual advancement of the soul.

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<sup>11</sup> At the same time, both Clement and Origen are influenced by Philo. Cf. A. van den Hoek, *Clement of Alexandria and His use of Philo in the Stromateis: An Early Christian reshaping of a Jewish model*, Leiden and New York, 1988; D. T. Runia, 'Philo and Origen: A Preliminary Survey,' *Philo and the Church Fathers: a collection of papers* (Leiden, 1995), pp.117-125.

<sup>12</sup> Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.3 (PG 20, col.529). It was very common in late antiquity to call ascetic lifestyle 'philosophic,' or 'the life of a philosopher.'

<sup>13</sup> Origen, *Homiliae in Genesim* 1.12-13 (PG 12, col.154-157).

<sup>14</sup> For the trichotomous anthropology of Origen, see H. Crouzel, *Origen*, tr. A. S. Worrall (Edinburgh, 1989), pp.87-94.

<sup>15</sup> Origen sees the sacred texts as containing threefold meanings: that of body, soul and spirit. While the bodily reading is good for the simple man, the spiritual meaning may edify the perfect man. Cf. Origen, *De Principiis* 4.2.4 (GCS 22, pp.312-313); see also Crouzel, *Origen*, pp.61-84.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. McGinn, *The Presence of God*, vol.1, p.115.

<sup>17</sup> Crouzel, *Origen*, p.130.

<sup>18</sup> McGinn, *The Presence of God*, vol.1, p.125.

Although Alexander is not as outstanding as Clement and Origen in church history, as the mentor and immediate predecessor of Athanasius, his influence is more direct and decisive.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the exact theological position of Alexander is a little obscure, and some exploration is needed. According to the records of ancient historians, the fourth-century controversy began with Arius' open objection to his bishop's preaching concerning the Son.<sup>20</sup> In an early letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia, the presbyter reports on the sayings of Alexander that made him protest, 'Always God, always Son; the Son is always contemporary with the Father. The Son is always with God without generation (ἀγεννήτως), always-begotten (ἀειγενής), unbegotten-begotten (ἀγεννητογενής). God does not precede the Son in thought or in a moment of time. Always God, always Son; the Son is from (ἐξ) God Himself.'<sup>21</sup> These teachings are certainly different from that of Arius, who proposes that there was when the Son was not and that He was created out of nothing. Nevertheless, they give no definite hint for the rejection of subordinationism. Alexander seems to be slow in responding to the criticism against him and vacillating in deciding to condemn Arius.<sup>22</sup> The reasons behind this may be many. But certainly, he was not so strongly anti-Arian at the beginning. It is after the wide spread of the dispute that his political position, possibly his theological position as well, became clear and firm.

What precisely are the so-called Arian views that Alexander feels unacceptable? We presently possess two important epistles handed down to us under the name of Alexander that may give us some clues.<sup>23</sup> In an encyclical letter, Alexander lists a series of Arian assertions that he believes to be problematic and rejects point by point later in the same epistle. Such assertions may be summarised into three: 1) There was when He was not (ἦν ποτε ὅτε οὐκ ἦν). 2) The Word of God was made from things that are not (ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων γέγονεν). 3) He is one of the things fashioned and made (εἷς τῶν ποιημάτων καὶ γενητῶν). Therefore, He is not like (ὅμοιος) to the Father in essence (οὐσίαν), but is by His very nature changeable (τρεπτός) and mutable (ἀλλοιωτός). Also, He cannot perfectly and accurately know the Father.<sup>24</sup> Not long after the publication of this

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<sup>19</sup> On this point, Hanson says, 'It is evident that at this early stage the chief influence upon Athanasius is Alexander of Alexandria, and indeed we can identify no predecessor who had a greater influence upon Athanasius than he.' Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p.424.

<sup>20</sup> Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.5 (PG 67, col.41).

<sup>21</sup> *Urkunde* 1; Theodoret, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.4 (PG 82, col.912); Epiphanius, *Panarion* 69.5-6 (GCS 37, pp.156-157).

<sup>22</sup> Sozomen even writes, 'Alexander seemed to incline first to one party and then to the other.' Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.15 (PG 67, col.905).

<sup>23</sup> There is another treatise called *Homilia de anima et corpore deque passione domini*. However, concerning the theological position of Alexander, the two epistles are more important.

<sup>24</sup> *Urkunde* 4b; Alexander, *Epistula Encyclica* 3 (PG 18, col.573). G. C. Stead argues that this work was in fact not written by Alexander, but drafted by Athanasius. Cf. G. C. Stead, 'Athanasius' Earliest Written Work,' *JThS* NS 39 (1988):76-91. His view is not commonly agreed by scholars. The treatise is



encyclical letter, the Arian party sent a reconciliatory letter to Alexander explaining their faith. In the letter, the first phrase above is deliberately substituted by 'He was not before His generation' (οὐκ ἦν πρὸ τοῦ γεννηθῆναι). Also, the second and third phrases are removed, but the authors maintain that the Son was made to subsist by the Father at His own will and that He is a perfect creature (κτίσμα) of God.<sup>25</sup> Having noted these changes, when listing the 'problematic' Arian views at the beginning of his personal letter to his namesake in Constantinople, Alexander adds some statements responding to the new Arian claims on top of his previous charges. In addition to the first charge above, he condemns also those who say that 'He, who was not before, came into existence afterwards' (γέγονεν ὕστερον ὁ πρότερον μὴ ὑπάρχων). He rejects the inclusion of the Son in the creation, and explains that this implies 'He is of mutable nature, and capable both of virtue and vice' and assumes 'He is from things which were not.' In other words, the second and third charges above persist.<sup>26</sup> After that, Alexander expounds his theological view and criticises the Arian assertions one by one. His discussion may be divided into three sections. The first section argues that 'there was not when He was not' (οὔτε ἦν ποτε ὅτε οὐκ ἦν).<sup>27</sup> The second one disputes that 'it is an insane thing (μανιώδης) to think that the Son was made from things which are not.'<sup>28</sup> In the third section, Alexander contends that the Sonship of our Saviour has nothing at all in common with the sonship of the rest. Being the only-begotten Son (ὁ μονογενὴς Υἱός), He is from the Father Himself (ἐξ αὐτοῦ ὅντος πατρός) and most exactly preserves His expressed likeness. He is in no way different from the Father and has all His attributes like unchangeability and immutability. In this alone is He inferior to the Father that He is not unbegotten.<sup>29</sup> Here, it should be noted that Alexander has loaded many things into the term μονογενής. It implies full divinity like the Father, a belief Athanasius defends zealously throughout his career.

In the 325 Council of Nicaea, Alexander took a leading part in the final condemnation of the Arians and in the establishment of the Nicene Creed. The formation of this creed has been variously discussed by scholars. Some hold that it is mainly an Alexandrian document, whereas some argue that it is basically a western faith imposed on the Eastern Church by Hosius and Constantine. In a recent re-evaluation, O. Skarsaune has tried to reattribute the drafting effort to the Alexander party. He

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consistently regarded as one of Alexander's works by M. Geerard, and is included in both 1974 *CPG* and 1998 *CPG Supplement* as no.2000.

<sup>25</sup> *Urkunde* 6; *De Syn.* 16 (PG 26, col.709).

<sup>26</sup> *Urkunde* 14; Alexander, *Epistula ad Alexandrum Thessalonicensem* 2 (PG 18, col.552).

<sup>27</sup> *Urkunde* 14; Alexander, *Epistula ad Alexandrum Thessalonicensem* 4 (PG 18, col.553).

<sup>28</sup> *Urkunde* 14; Alexander, *Epistula ad Alexandrum Thessalonicensem* 6 (PG 18, col.556).

<sup>29</sup> *Urkunde* 14; Alexander, *Epistula ad Alexandrum Thessalonicensem* 8-9, 12 (PG 18, col.560-561, 565-568).

demonstrates that there is a massive take-over of Alexander's characteristic catchwords in the so-called proto-Nicene Creed.<sup>30</sup> I think his arguments are persuasive. Here, one more point may be added. Why is it necessary to include in the Nicene anathema two very similar phrases, ἦν ποτε ὅτε οὐκ ἦν and πρὶν γεννηθῆναι οὐκ ἦν?<sup>31</sup> If one investigates the past experience of Alexander mentioned above, the answer is not difficult to find. Both of them are 'problematic' Arian slogans Alexander encountered in different stages of the controversy. The condemned views listed in the anathema are almost exactly the same as the Arian charges we have found in his letter to Alexander of Constantinople.

If the Nicene Creed was mainly drafted by the Alexander party, what do they hope to express through it? In the creed, Alexander's key term μονογενῆ, which is normally used as a modifier of υἱὸν in other ancient creeds, is singly placed after the phrase γεννηθέντα ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς. Such arrangement suggests that the creed-makers wanted to define clearly the generation of the Son. Since the word γεννάω may mean 'create' for the Arians, the phrase 'begotten from the Father' can achieve nothing if its implication is not limited.<sup>32</sup> Unfortunately, the opponents also had their own alternative interpretation of the term μονογενῆ. In the 359 dated creed of Sirmium, as well as in the 360 homoean creed, they elucidated it explicitly as 'alone from the Father alone' (μόνον ἐκ μόνον τοῦ Πατρὸς).<sup>33</sup> This forced the Alexander party to take further steps to clarify the orthodox Christology. They finally added one more phrase 'from the essence of the Father' (ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ Πατρὸς) after the word μονογενῆ. Besides, after the following phrase 'God from God, Light from Light' (Θεὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ, Φῶς ἐκ Φωτός), they inserted additionally 'very God from very God' (Θεὸν ἀληθινὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ ἀληθινοῦ), 'begotten not made' (γεννηθέντα οὐ ποιηθέντα), and 'one in essence with the Father' (ὁμοούσιον τῷ Πατρί). Consistently, when talking about these anti-Arian insertions, most of the focus has been put on the implication of οὐσία and ὁμοούσιος. However, as G. C. Stead has shown, these terms were used in a wide variety of senses in antiquity and might be interpreted differently by different people. Basically, the word ὁμοούσιος did not have the sense of 'numerical identity of substance.'<sup>34</sup> What then are the functions of these insertions?

<sup>30</sup> O. Skarsaune, 'A Neglected Detail in the Creed of Nicaea (325),' *VC* 41 (1987):34-54.

<sup>31</sup> For the text of the creed, see J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed (London, 1972), pp.215-216.

<sup>32</sup> Judging from Isa. 1:2 (LXX: υἱοὺς ἐγέννησα καὶ ὕψωσα), the Arians suggest that 'beget' in the case of the Son may actually mean the same as 'create.' Cf. *De Decretis* 10 (PG 25, col.440-441). For this reason, the Arian party may say simultaneously in the reconciliatory letter to Alexander that God 'begot (γεννήσαντα) an only-begotten Son before eternal time' and the Son 'was created (κτισθέντα) before times.' Cf. *Urkunde* 6; *De Syn.* 16 (PG 26, col.709).

<sup>33</sup> Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, p.289, 293. This explains why Eusebius of Caesarea appears to have nothing uneasy with this term when he notified his flock of the result of the 325 ecumenical council. Cf. *Urkunde* 22; Eusebius, *Epistula Nicaenae Synodi* (PG 20, col.1536-1544).

<sup>34</sup> G. C. Stead, *Divine Substance* (Oxford, 1977), chap.VI-IX.

According to the general structure of the creed, it is quite obvious that all these anti-Arian insertions are used to further qualify the generation of the Son. Since the term *μονογενῆ* could be ‘twisted’ by the opponents, Alexander had to concretise its assumed meanings into clear words. By comparing the insertions with the assumed meanings expounded in the epistle to his namesake, we can see that their existence may have three designed purposes. Firstly, with the phrases *ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ Πατρὸς* and *ὁμοούσιον τῷ Πατρί*, the creed fixes the origin of the Son to the Father Himself. He is neither from another external substance outside the Father nor from nothing. Secondly, the phrase *γεννηθέντα οὐ ποιηθέντα* makes the Arian interpretation of the word *γεννάω* as ‘create’ illicit. The Sonship of Christ is completely different from that of the creation. Thirdly, concerning the phrase *Θεὸν ἀληθινὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ ἀληθινοῦ*, we must first ask why it is necessary to add it if there is another similar phrase *Θεὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ*. Clearly, its major emphasis is on the modifier *ἀληθινὸν*. It indicates that the begotten Son has full divinity like the Father. He is in no way different from the Father, but equal to Him except that He is not unbegotten. Although the word *ὁμοούσιος* in certain extent may carry similar implication, the term *Θεὸν ἀληθινὸν*, which scholars often neglect, is the actual weapon Alexander used to protect the orthodox faith from ‘heretic’ subordinationism. Here, it should be noted that, if Origen’s Son and Spirit are ‘derivative and can thus be called created’ as J. R. Lyman suggests,<sup>35</sup> and if Origen has sharply repudiated the idea that ‘the Son is generated out of the Father’s *ousia*’ and has said that ‘the Father transcends the Son and the Spirit *more* than they transcend the creaturely world’ as R. D. Williams argues,<sup>36</sup> this anti-Arian insertions mark a clear deviation from the Origenist tradition, or at least one side of it.

It is difficult to say whether such insertions were enough or not. At least, when Eusebius of Caesarea wrote a letter reporting the decision of the Council of Nicaea, he had to spend much effort to ‘explain’ the meaning of the creed to his flock.<sup>37</sup> This implies that the literal meanings of the insertions are primarily incompatible with his own theological conviction. The repeated removals of these four insertions in the later Arian creeds suggest that the opponents really felt uneasy to them. No matter how the Arians interpret it, the Nicene Creed contains what Alexander believes to be the orthodox

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<sup>35</sup> Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology*, pp.50-51.

<sup>36</sup> R. D. Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (London, 1987), p.134.

<sup>37</sup> In the letter, Eusebius explains that the phrase *ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας* is just indicative of the Son’s being indeed from the Father, without being as if a part of His essence. The phrase *οὐ ποιηθέντα* simply means that the Son is not like other creatures. Similarly, the word *ὁμοούσιος* only suggests that the Son bears no resemblance to the originated creatures, but to His Father alone. He has not queried in the letter the phrase *Θεὸν ἀληθινὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ ἀληθινοῦ*. The reason behind this is plain. Just after the Nicene Council, who would dare say openly that the Son is not very God? Cf. *Urkunde 22*; Eusebius, *Epistula Nicaenae Synodi* 5-7 (PG 20, col.1540-1541). However, Eusebius has rejected this concept a little earlier. In his *Epistula ad Euphratorem*, he writes explicitly that the Son himself is God (*Θεός*), but not true God (*ἀληθινός Θεός*). Cf. *Urkunde 3*. According to the report of Athanasius, Arius has also said explicitly, ‘The Word is not true God (*Θεός ἀληθινός*).’ *Or. Ar.* 1.6 (PG 26, col.21-24).

Christology. Attending the old bishop in the council, Athanasius, who was a young deacon at that time, served as his secretary. Three years later, probably with the testament of the deceased Alexander, he was elected as the bishop of Alexandria while he was very probably still not yet the canonical age of thirty.<sup>38</sup> Being deeply influenced by his reverend predecessor, Athanasius defended what he believed to be the Nicene faith steadfastly throughout his episcopacy.

## 2. Factors moulding Athanasius' Theological System

For most church fathers, theology is the outward expression of internal spirituality, which is determined by one's own personal experience, social culture and communal belief. Living in the ancient world, Athanasius has a deep reverence for tradition and antiquity.<sup>39</sup> Believing in Christianity, he considers the Scriptures as the highest authority on religious matters. As an Alexandrian theologian, he learned Christian use of Platonic ontology and cosmology from Clement and Origen, who were in turn inspired by Philo.<sup>40</sup> Having been shepherded by Alexander, he treated the task of defending against Arian subordinationism as his lifelong career. Deeply revering the hermit Antony, he promoted asceticism and monasticism enthusiastically.<sup>41</sup> All these factors combined together constituted the whole spirituality and theology of the bishop. As spirituality, as well as theology, is closely related with one's own experience, it is impossible to understand the theological system of Athanasius without considering his background. Unfortunately, due to the modern disciplinary division between theology and church history, most Athanasian scholars only focus their attentions either on his thought or on his life. Consequently, many important things are misinterpreted.

In the study of patristic doctrine, the traditional methodology is to put a particular figure into a conventional systematic theological framework. A typical example is the standard *Early Christian Doctrines* of J. N. D. Kelly.<sup>42</sup> Based on this framework, some scholars have tried to trace particular dogmatic themes across church history, such as

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<sup>38</sup> On the question of the age of Athanasius and its relationship to the question of his consecration, see Martin, 'Athanasios et les Méliens,' pp.32-61; and Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, p.10.

<sup>39</sup> Sharing with the rest of the ancient world, the church fathers all have a deep reverence for tradition and antiquity. Cf. B. Ramsey, *Beginning to Read the Fathers* (London, 1993), p.15.

<sup>40</sup> Concerning Athanasius' use of Platonic terminology, Meijering suggests that it is because Platonism was at that time no longer a real danger to the church. Cf. Meijering, *Orthodoxy and Platonism in Athanasius: Synthesis or Antithesis?* p.131. However, in view of the anti-philosophical attitude in the *C. Gent.*, it is better to accept that Athanasius borrowed this Platonic usage indirectly from Clement and Origen.

<sup>41</sup> For the relationship between Antony and Athanasius, see Chapter Three part A.2 of this thesis. For Athanasius' participation in the fourth-century monastic movement, see Kannengiesser, 'Athanasius of Alexandria and the ascetic movement of his time,' pp.479-492.

<sup>42</sup> In the book, theology of Athanasius is discussed separately under the chapters 'The doctrine of the Trinity,' 'Fourth-century Christology,' 'Fallen man and God's grace' and 'Christ's saving work.' J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrine*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., London, 1977.



Christology and pneumatology.<sup>43</sup> All these attempts are good for tracing doctrinal development, but not for understanding the thoughts of individual fathers. However, as a norm of theological research in the past, this methodology has also been widely used in the study of individual historical figures including Athanasius. For example, J. Quasten divided his theology into six parts and analysed them separately.<sup>44</sup> R. P. C. Hanson evaluated his Christology alone without associating it with other doctrines.<sup>45</sup> Of course, because of the limitation of length, only selected themes in the thought of Athanasius may be discussed in single articles.<sup>46</sup> All these scholarly efforts are valuable, but are too fragmentary for proper understanding of his theology as a whole. The only two comprehensive and structural treatments on Athanasius in recent years have been those authored by A. Pettersen and K. Anatolios. Surrounding the theme on the goodness of God, Pettersen tried to draw the whole picture of Athanasius' thought in seven chapters, linked up nearly all dogmatic themes together and uncovered their interrelationship.<sup>47</sup> With a similar approach but with different emphases, Anatolios suggests that the intrinsic centre of the bishop's theology is the distinction and simultaneous relation between God and the world, to which every aspect of his doctrines may be related. After examining its inner logic, he concludes that Athanasius' theological vision is largely Irenaeian and his system is both consistent and coherent.<sup>48</sup> These two works broke through the traditional fragmentary treatment of Athanasian scholarship. However, they still focused mainly on his theology and failed to integrate it with his spiritual life.

One of the focuses of modern academic discussions of the characteristics of Athanasius' theology is his relationship with other ancient thinkers, particularly Origen and Arius. For example, T. E. Pollard suggests that there is in Origen's thought a tension between the philosophical-cosmological Logos-concept and the biblical-soteriological Son-concept. While Arius tried to solve the problem by denying the identity of the Logos and the Son, Athanasius asserted this identity and made the Son-concept regulative. The Arian controversy was an arena in which soteriology triumphed over cosmology.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, G. Florovsky proposes that there is an unresolved inner contradiction in the

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<sup>43</sup> E.g. A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., tr. J. Bowden, London and Oxford, 1975; and S. M. Burgess, *The Spirit and the Church: Antiquity*, Peabody, 1984.

<sup>44</sup> The six parts are 'Trinity,' 'Logos and Redemption,' 'Christology,' 'Holy Spirit,' 'Baptism' and 'Eucharist.' Quasten, *Patrology*, vol.3, pp.66-79.

<sup>45</sup> In his critical evaluation of Athanasius' theology, he has only discussed three topics: the Father and the Son, Homousios, and Incarnation. Many related doctrines such as cosmology are left untouched. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, pp.421-458.

<sup>46</sup> E.g. A. Louth, 'The Concept of the Soul in Athanasius' *Contra Gentes—De Incarnatione*, *StP* 13 (1975):227-231; and C. R. Strange, 'Athanasius on Divinization,' *StP* 16 (1985):342-346.

<sup>47</sup> Pettersen, *Athanasius*.

<sup>48</sup> Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought*.

<sup>49</sup> T. E. Pollard, 'Logos and Son in Origen, Arius and Athanasius,' *StP* 2 (1957):282-287.



system of Origen, which may lead to two opposite options: to reject the eternity of the world or to contest the eternity of the Logos. While Arius took the latter, Athanasius chose the former.<sup>50</sup> In an attempt to re-evaluate early Arianism, R. C. Gregg and D. E. Groh categorise the Arian and the Athanasian views into a Christology of divine will and one of divine nature respectively. The Arian Logos is generated by grace, whereas the Athanasian Son is eternal by nature. The linkage between the Father and the Son is transactional for the former, and ontological for the latter.<sup>51</sup> Talking about the humanity of Christ, A. Louth propounds that the basic ontological distinction of the cosmos is between the spiritual and the material for Origen, and between Creator and creatures for Athanasius. The latter regards the historical incarnation as the union of the Uncreated Logos and a created human nature.<sup>52</sup> Dealing with his asceticism, D. B. Brakke argues that Athanasius had altered the Origenist tradition radically. He replaced the original ignorance theme with corruption, and modified the intellectual spirituality with ethical elements.<sup>53</sup> These works have revealed some special features of Athanasius' system and related his thought with contemporary ideological trends. However, they still have not explained the situational reasons for his choices and their information is not yet complete.

In two recent studies of patristic theology, however, the concern of associating doctrinal views with Athanasius' personal background is raised. In her *Christology and Cosmology*, J. R. Lyman compares the theological systems of Origen, Eusebius and Athanasius and concludes that their concerns were not only matters relating to individual beliefs. Each figure also represented the spiritual and social realities of the communities from which they came, and which shaped the focus and language of each.<sup>54</sup> After contrasting the concepts of the Fatherhood of God in the mind of Origen and Athanasius, P. Widdicombe judges that the differences in their theological structure reflect both the differences in their relations to Greek philosophy and Christian tradition and the differences in the challenges each was attempting to meet. The doctrinal challenge of Origen was from Marcionism, whereas that of Athanasius was from Arianism.<sup>55</sup> Clearly, to understand and evaluate the theology of a father accurately, two criteria must be met. Firstly, we must *consider the system as a whole and avoid fragmentary treatment*. Secondly, we must also *relate theology with the factors that constituted the formation of one's spirituality*. It is inappropriate to judge the view of a father without looking at his own personal experience and situational needs.

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<sup>50</sup> Florovsky, 'The Concept of Creation in Saint Athanasius,' pp.42-43.

<sup>51</sup> Gregg and Groh, *Early Arianism: A View of Salvation*, chap.5.

<sup>52</sup> A. Louth, 'Athanasius' Understanding of the Humanity of Christ,' *StP* 16 (1985):311.

<sup>53</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, pp.145-149.

<sup>54</sup> Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology*, p.160.

<sup>55</sup> Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius*, p.250.

Theological reflection is a dynamic process in which existing concepts are challenged and adjusted continuously by life experience. Before proceeding into Athanasius' doctrinal system, we must first ask what are the controlling factors that shaped his thought most decisively. From the above literature survey, one may immediately observe that this is a difficult and controversial task. While certain scholars suggest that his concern for soteriology is most crucial,<sup>56</sup> others maintain that the governing concept is his focus on the divine nature.<sup>57</sup> Whilst some regard divinisation as central,<sup>58</sup> some see it as a complementary side motif.<sup>59</sup> Not long after the suggestion that Athanasius had changed the traditional ignorance theme into corruption was made,<sup>60</sup> the proposal of treating the convergence between divine transcendence and divine immanence as his central focus was advanced.<sup>61</sup> In this chaotic situation, some scholars have even said explicitly that his writings were far from systematic and lacked a single central point.<sup>62</sup> To surmount these debates and have a correct interpretation of his theology, we must start with the spirituality of Athanasius by going back to his personal situation. Amongst the major concepts moulding the ideology of fourth-century Egyptian Christians, many such as Greek philosophies were optional, which Athanasius employed selectively according to their suitability. While the Origenist and other early patristic teachings seem to have had the deepest influence, some ideas such as asceticism were his own preference. From his life, it is not difficult to observe that there are two overwhelming controlling factors governing the whole of his theological thought. They are the Scriptural facts and Nicene faith. As a commonly accepted tradition of the whole church, the Scriptures were revered as the highest authority of Christian belief. Being an ecclesiastical bishop, Athanasius could not and did not violate this rule. Although the method of interpretation, literal or allegorical, might vary, the key biblical facts such as the incarnation and crucifixion of Christ could never be altered.<sup>63</sup> Athanasius also

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<sup>56</sup> Pollard, 'Logos and Son in Origen, Arius and Athanasius,' p.287; Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p.423.

<sup>57</sup> Florovsky, 'The Concept of Creation in Saint Athanasius,' p.47; Gregg and Groh, *Early Arianism: A View of Salvation*, chap.5. P. Widdicombe has tried to combine these two views and says, 'Soteriological concerns, then, lay at the heart of Athanasius' thinking about the doctrine of the Trinity. But more than that, the Trinitarian nature of God also lay at the heart of his understanding of the divine act of creation and the Trinity was the model for the life of the church and the means by which we might imitate that model.' P. Widdicombe, 'Athanasius and the Making of the Doctrine of the Trinity,' *Pro Ecclesia* 6 (1997):456.

<sup>58</sup> Strange, 'Athanasius on Divinization,' pp.342-346; K. E. Norman, 'Deification: the Content of Athanasian Soteriology,' Ph.D. diss. (Duke University, 1980), p.171.

<sup>59</sup> H. Hess, 'The Place of Divinization in Athanasius Soteriology,' *StP* 26 (1993):369-374.

<sup>60</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, pp.145-149.

<sup>61</sup> Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought*, p.206.

<sup>62</sup> G. Bebawi, 'St. Athanasios: The Dynamics of Salvation,' *Sob* 8.2 (1986):25.

<sup>63</sup> As Kannengiesser says, 'The Athanasian notion of faith seems "institutional," resting entirely on the historical revelation of God as communicated by the Gospel narratives.' C. Kannengiesser, 'The Spiritual Message of the Great Fathers,' *CSp* 1:63. Although Hanson argues that 'Athanasius is often wholly astray

inherited the orthodox doctrine from Alexander, and he went on to defend the Nicene faith against Arianism to the end. It is hard to define precisely how much he had learned from his immediate predecessor, but certainly the orthodox Christology concerning the full divinity of the Son and the unity of the Triad was the most central.<sup>64</sup> In the following discussion, we will probe briefly how the above concepts integrated together and formed Athanasius' theological system.

### a) Formation of the Controlling Doctrine—Trinitarian Theology

In the Hebrew bible, יהוה was revealed as the unique and highest God for Israel.<sup>65</sup> He is eternal, omnipotent, loving, righteous, holy, merciful and unchangeable.<sup>66</sup> These divine attributes were taken for granted with intensified emphasis on the uniqueness of God in the New Testament.<sup>67</sup> Combining with contemporary Greek philosophies, particularly Middle Platonism, early Christian apologists described ὁ Θεός as 'uncreated (ἀγένητον), eternal (αἰδιον), invisible (ἀόρατον), impassible (ἀπαθῆ), incomprehensible (ἀκατάληπτον), illimitable (ἀχώρητον).'<sup>68</sup> Gradually, this concept became a norm in the early Christian Church. Following this norm, Athanasius understands God as incorporeal (ἀσώματος), incorruptible (ἄφθαρτος) and immortal (ἀθάνατος).<sup>69</sup> He is not constituted of different elements but is Himself the Creator of the composition of the universe.<sup>70</sup> Besides being good (ἀγαθός) and man-loving (φιλόανθρωπος), He is also by nature invisible (ἀόρατος) and incomprehensible (ἀκατάληπτος).<sup>71</sup> All the divine attributes Athanasius affirmed above are commonly accepted by most of his contemporaries.

Being conceived as God in the absolute sense, the Father was believed without doubt to have all these divine attributes. The major controversial issue in Athanasius' day concerned the nature of the Son. In addition to the Father, the Son, as well as the Spirit, was also praised as God in the believing community. As the Scriptural teachings are indisputably monotheistic, the relationship between these three names became a theological problem that needed to be solved. While Adoptionism tried to affirm the divine uniqueness by negating the divinity of Jesus, Sabellianism achieved the same

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on the details of the Bible,' he does also agree that 'his philosophical language is all devoted to what was ultimately a Scriptural argument.' Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p.424, 422.

<sup>64</sup> For a discussion of the Christocentrism and Theocentrism of Athanasius' theology, see Torrance, 'Athanasius: A Study in the Foundations of Classical Theology,' pp.251-266.

<sup>65</sup> Deut. 6:4; Ps. 95:3.

<sup>66</sup> Eternalness (Deut. 32:40; Isa. 44:6), omnipotence (Gen. 17:1; Jer. 32:18), lovingness (Ps. 63:3; Jer. 33:11), righteousness (Job 37:23; Ps. 11:7), holiness (Lev. 11:44; Ps. 22:3), mercifulness (Exo. 33:19; Deut. 4:31), and unchangeableness (Ps. 102:27; Mal. 3:6).

<sup>67</sup> Jn. 17:3; 1 Cor. 8:4-6; Gal. 3:20; Eph. 4:5; 1 Tim. 1:17, 2:5; Jam. 2:19.

<sup>68</sup> Athenagoras, *Legatio pro Christianis* 10 (Schoedel, p.20).

<sup>69</sup> *C. Gent.* 22 (Thomson, p.60).

<sup>70</sup> *C. Gent.* 28 (Thomson, p.76).

<sup>71</sup> *C. Gent.* 35 (Thomson, p.94).

purpose by denying their distinction. In church history, the apologist Theophilus seems to have been the first to use the word *τριάς* to refer to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as one.<sup>72</sup> Amongst various attempts, the mainstream Eastern Church embraced the *Λόγος* Christology promoted by Clement and Origen. However, both their theologies present a certain unresolved tension on the relative status of the divine persons. On the one hand, they affirmed the eternity of the Son and His union with the Father.<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, they also developed a certain subordinationism in their approaches.<sup>74</sup> While the former emphasis was taken up by Alexander, the latter was adopted and developed in an extreme way by Arius.<sup>75</sup>

Deeply influenced by Alexander, accompanied by strong reaction against the Arian challenges, Athanasius supported firmly the orthodox interpretation of the Nicene Christology. For him, the Son (*Υἱός*) is eternally begotten (*γεννητός*) from the Father (*Πατήρ*) who is Himself unbegotten (*ἀγέννητος*). He is the creator (*κτίστης*) and not a creature (*κτίσις*). While all things were created by the Father through the Son, He alone was begotten without beginning.<sup>76</sup> This generation of the Son from the Father is not according to the nature of men (*τὴν ἀνθρώπων φύσιν*). He is not only like, but also inseparable (*ἀδιαίρετός*) from the essence (*οὐσίας*) of the Father. He and the Father are one (*ἓν*).<sup>77</sup> This means not merely that the *οὐσία* of the Son is *of* the *οὐσία* of God, but that there is an indivisible and continuous relation of being of the Father in the Son. The being of the Godhead is whole not in the Father alone but also in the Son and the Holy Spirit.<sup>78</sup> The Son is like the Father in all respects and in all things, except that He is not unbegotten, and is neither before (*πρότερον*) nor after (*ὕστερον*), but co-existent

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<sup>72</sup> Theophilus, *Ad Autolycum* 2.15 (PTS 44, p.62).

<sup>73</sup> Clement insists that the Son was generated from the Father without beginning and is essentially one with Him. Cf. Clement, *Stromata* 5.1.1, 7.2.5 (GCS 15, p.326; GCS 17, pp.5-6); *Paedagogus* 1.8.62, 1.8.71 (GCS 12, p.127, 131-132). Origen even uses directly the word *ὁμοούσιος* to describe the community of substance between the Son and the Father. Cf. Origen, *Fragmenta in Hebraeos* (PG 14, col.1308). The authenticity of this fragment was defended by G. C. Stead in 1977, rejected by R. P. C. Hanson in 1988, and defended again by M. J. Edwards in 1998. Cf. Stead, *Divine Substance*, pp.211-214; Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, pp.68-69; and M. J. Edwards, 'Did Origen apply the word *homousios* to the Son?' *JThS* 49 (1998):658-670.

<sup>74</sup> The *λόγος* in Clement's theology is very similar to the *νοῦς* in Neo-Platonism. As the latter is a subordinate divine being, Clement is frequently interpreted as a promoter of subordinationism. While treating the Father as the only *αὐτόθεος*, Origen calls the *λόγος* a *δεύτερος θεός*. He is inferior to the Father. Cf. Origen, *Contra Celsum* 5.39, 8.15 (GCS 3, p.43, 232-233); *Commentarii in Ioannem* 6.39.202 (GCS 10, pp.148-149).

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Pollard, 'Logos and Son in Origen, Arius and Athanasius,' pp.282-287.

<sup>76</sup> While the Arians understood the terms 'unbegotten' (*ἀγέννητος*) and 'unoriginate' (*ἀγένητος*) as synonyms, Athanasius interpreted them differently. By defining *γεννητός* as what is created, he argues that the Son is *γεννητός* but not *γενητός*. Cf. *Or. Ar.* 1.30-34 (PG 26, col.73-84).

<sup>77</sup> *De Decretis* 20 (PG 25, col.452).

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Torrance, 'Athanasius: A Study in the Foundations of Classical Theology,' p.246. See also T. G. Weinandy, *Does God Change? The Word's Becoming in the Incarnation* (Petersham, 1985), pp.10-16; and *The Father's Spirit of Sonship: Reconceiving the Trinity* (Edinburgh, 1995), pp.11-13.



(συνυπάρχειν) with Him. He is the very form of the Godhead (αὐτὸ τὸ τῆς θεότητος εἶδος).<sup>79</sup> For this reason, the Son is equal in honour and glory with the Father and has all His divine attributes.<sup>80</sup> The status of the Son is apparently higher in Athanasius than that in Origen. However, as G. C. Stead has shown, Athanasius maintains a certain traditional hierarchy between the Father and the Son. He uses ὁμοούσιος only in the context of the Nicene creed and never exchanges the role of the Father and of the Son on this issue.<sup>81</sup> Against the Arian Christology, Athanasius insists that the Son did not exist merely by the Father's free will (βουλή). His intimate relation with the Father is by nature (φύσει), and not by grace (χάριτι).<sup>82</sup> He is the Father's supremely perfect issue (καρπὸς παντέλειος) and his express image (εἰκὼν ἀπαράλλακτος). He alone is the very Wisdom (αὐτοσοφία), very Word (αὐτολόγος) and very Power (αὐτοδύναμις) proper (ἴδιος) to the Father.<sup>83</sup> When the Father is Light (Φῶς), He is His Radiance (Ἀπαύγασμα).<sup>84</sup> Such names suggest that the Son is the active agent and outward expression of the unchanging and invisible Father. While the Father is the source of goodness (πηγὴ τῆς ἀγαθότητος), the Son is the active goodness acting on and revealing to the creation.<sup>85</sup> For this reason, God steadily moves and supports the universe,<sup>86</sup> and manifests Himself through the Son His Word.<sup>87</sup> Because of their intimate relationship, when thinking of the Son one may also think of the Father.<sup>88</sup>

Athanasius likewise believes that the Holy Spirit is very God and is united with the Father and the Son. In his writings he emphasises, 'The Spirit is not a creature (κτίσμα), but is Spirit of God (Πνεῦμα τοῦ Θεοῦ); and in God there is a Triad (Τριάς), Father, Son and Holy Spirit.'<sup>89</sup> J. McIntyre has written of three principles, which characterise the pneumatologies of the Nicene Fathers, among whom Athanasius is numbered: the

<sup>79</sup> *Ad Aeg. Lib.* 17 (PG 25, col.577).

<sup>80</sup> *Om. Tra.* 3, 5 (PG 25, col.213, 217).

<sup>81</sup> Stead, *Divine Substance*, p.260. For Athanasius' use of the term ὁμοούσιος, see Pettersen, *Athanasius*, pp.146-160.

<sup>82</sup> *Or. Ar.* 3.58-67 (PG 26, col.444-468). On this point, as Pettersen observed, Athanasius' reasons are threefold. Firstly, if a being is free to will a particular thing, the same being is free not to so will. This will place God's immutability at stake and render his goodness not essential but incidental. Secondly, while there is correlativity between one who wills and that willed, the relation is not one of being. The former's existence does not necessarily entail the latter's existence. Finally, no matter how superb a creature, what is willed, once was not. Cf. Pettersen, *Athanasius*, pp.170-171.

<sup>83</sup> *C. Gent.* 46 (Thomson, p.130).

<sup>84</sup> *Or. Ar.* 1.25 (PG 26, col.64).

<sup>85</sup> *De Incarn.* 3 (Thomson, p.140). A. Pettersen even suggests that for Athanasius 'the Creator is not only the source of all goodness but is Goodness itself.' A. Pettersen, 'A good being would envy none life: Athanasius on the Goodness of God,' *Theology Today* 55 (1998):59.

<sup>86</sup> *C. Gent.* 2, 44 (Thomson, p.6, 122); *De Incarn.* 3 (Thomson, p.140).

<sup>87</sup> *De Incarn.* 16 (Thomson, p.172); *Or. Ar.* 2.81 (PG 26, col.320).

<sup>88</sup> *C. Gent.* 45 (Thomson, p.122). Athanasius' doctrine on the humanity of the incarnate Christ is a controversial issue. For a discussion of this matter, see Appendix B of this thesis.

<sup>89</sup> *Ad Serap.* 4.7 (PG 26, col.648).



principle of logical implication, the principle of definition and the principle of proportionality.<sup>90</sup> Firstly, the deity of the Holy Spirit is deduced from the unity of the activities of the Godhead, which in its turn is to be deduced from the unity of the Triad.<sup>91</sup> Secondly, knowledge of any one of the persons of the Triad is at the same time knowledge of the other two.<sup>92</sup> Finally, the relation of the Spirit to the Son is very similar to that of the Son to the Father.<sup>93</sup> The third principle here implies that acceptance of the full divine status of the Son would inevitably accept also that of the Spirit. Regarding the interrelationship of the Triad, Athanasius has not defined clearly whether the Spirit proceeds 'from the Father and the Son' or 'from the Father through the Son.' Although many scholars have tried to categorise him as East, West or just of middle field, it is better to follow S. M. Burgess' conclusion that there is no well-developed doctrine of the Spirit's procession from the Father and the Son in Athanasius. The bishop did not explain how the sending of the Spirit by the Son could be used to establish His procession from the Father.<sup>94</sup>

Based on the above understanding of the Son and the Spirit, Athanasius declares, 'There is an eternal and one Godhead in a Triad (αἰδιος καὶ μία θεότης ἐστὶν ἐν Τριάδι), and there is one Glory of the Holy Triad (καὶ μία δόξα τῆς ἁγίας Τριάδος).'<sup>95</sup> God is both One and Three. He is composed of 'persons' but indivisible. The Father, Son and Spirit are mutually indwelling and interpenetrating. Each person in the Triad is totally in the other two without, however, losing His distinctive identity. In the 362 Synod of Alexandria called by Athanasius, the theological controversy between the followers of Melitius and of the late Eustathius was reconciled. Here, whilst one group portrayed God as 'three ὑποστάσεις' emphasising the individuality of the Father, Son and Spirit, the other group described God as 'one ὑπόστασις' meaning one οὐσία. After serious investigation, they were both found to be compatible with the orthodox Trinitarian doctrine and were welcomed by Athanasius.<sup>96</sup> On the application of ὑπόστασις, R. P. C.

<sup>90</sup> J. McIntyre, *The Shape of Pneumatology: Studies in the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Edinburgh, 1997), chap.4.

<sup>91</sup> As Athanasius says, 'The Father does all things through (διὰ) the Word in (ἐν) the Holy Spirit. Thus the unity of the holy Triad (ἡ ἐνότης τῆς ἁγίας Τριάδος) is preserved.' *Ad Serap.* 1.28 (PG 26, col.596).

<sup>92</sup> For example, Athanasius says, 'For the holy and blessed Triad is indivisible (ἀδιαίρετος) and one in itself (ἡνωμένη πρὸς ἑαυτήν). When mention (λεγομένου) is made of the Father, there is included also his Word, and the Spirit who is in the Son. If the Son is named (ὀνομάζεται), the Father is in the Son, and the Spirit is not outside the Word.' *Ad Serap.* 1.14 (PG 26, col.565).

<sup>93</sup> On this point, Athanasius writes, 'And if the Son, because he is of the Father, is proper to his essence (ἴδιος τῆς οὐσίας αὐτοῦ), it must be that the Spirit, who is said to be from God, is in essence proper to the Son (ἴδιον εἶναι κατ' οὐσίαν τοῦ Υἱοῦ).' *Ad Serap.* 1.25 (PG 26, col.588-589).

<sup>94</sup> Burgess, *The Spirit & the Church: Antiquity*, p.120. For various interpretations of Athanasius' doctrine of the *Filioque*, see J. van Rossum, 'Athanasius and the *Filioque*: *Ad Serapionem* 1,20 in Nikephoros Blemmydes and Gregory of Cyprus,' *StP* 32 (1997):53-58.

<sup>95</sup> *Or. Ar.* 1.18 (PG 26, col.48).

<sup>96</sup> *Tom. Ant.* 5-6 (PG 26, col.800-804).

Hanson charges Athanasius that he did not define and use the word properly.<sup>97</sup> However, it should be noted that this word did not have precise theological definition until the last quarter of the fourth century when the Cappadocian fathers proposed that God is one οὐσία and three ὑποστάσεις. On this point, A. Pettersen is right in saying that Athanasius' interest is not in terminological strictness but in right theology.<sup>98</sup>

## b) Formation of the Theological Skeleton—Doctrine of Creation

Every doctrine of God must be supported by a correspondent worldview. In the time of Athanasius, there were two dominant worldviews in the Church. Basing their view on the Scriptures, some fathers made a clear distinction between the Creator and creatures. While the whole universe was created by God in the beginning, the incarnation is an act in which the Creator came to the created world.<sup>99</sup> Using philosophical approaches, some ancient teachers, particularly the Gnostics, viewed the universe as a graded hierarchy. Between the transcendent God and the material world are a series of emanations, which act as middlemen between the highest and the lowest.<sup>100</sup> While the divine-human encounter of the former is immediate, the latter is mediate. Being a faithful defender of orthodox doctrine, Athanasius took what he believed to be the biblical view and sacrificed the hierarchical cosmology. However, with his deep conviction concerning divine immutability, Origen has suggested that God never advanced toward what He had not been before. From this cause, he deduces that the prevision (*virtute praescientiae*) of the whole creation (*universa creatura*) is eternally in the very subsistence of the divine Wisdom.<sup>101</sup> Since Athanasius had equated the Son with the Σοφία and made clear demarcation between Creator and creatures, this Origenist view when applied to his system would eventually make the ideas of the primordial spiritual world part of the absolute God, which is certainly to be avoided. On this point, G. Florovsky is right in discerning that there were but two opposite options: to reject the eternity of the world or

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<sup>97</sup> Here, Hanson says, 'For Athanasius *ousia* is what God is, what makes God God. But what did *hypostasis* mean to him? We must answer, almost nothing.' Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p.444.

<sup>98</sup> Pettersen, *Athanasius*, p.161.

<sup>99</sup> Gen. 1:1-2:3; Jn. 1:1-14. Early representative figures of this view include Irenaeus, Tertullian and Hippolytus.

<sup>100</sup> The major supporters of this view were Valentinus and Basilides. Since Origen sees the λόγος as the link between the goodness of divine nature and the goodness of creatures in his *De Principiis*, some scholars such as J. B. Lyman suggest that he also held a hierarchical view of the universe which was translated in his theodicy into a dynamic cosmology of individual progress toward salvation. Cf. Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology*, p.50. G. Florovsky even says explicitly, 'Actually, in Origen's conception there was but one eternal hierarchical system of beings, a "chain of being". He could never escape the cosmological pattern of Middle Platonism.' Florovsky, 'The Concept of Creation in Saint Athanasius,' p.41.

<sup>101</sup> Origen, *De Principiis* 1.2.2-10 (GCS 22, pp.28-44). This view is acceptable and explainable in the hierarchical cosmology.

that of the Λόγος.<sup>102</sup> Of course, Athanasius chose the former, which implied *creatio ex nihilo* by divine free will.<sup>103</sup> He suggests that the whole universe was created out of nothing by the Father through (διὰ) the Word in (ἐν) the Spirit.<sup>104</sup> God called what was formerly not into being and ordered it as seemed best to Him.<sup>105</sup>

To understand Athanasius' doctrine of creation, two important concepts must be noted. The first one is about nature and will. Different from Origen who closely links these two terms together, Athanasius defines them very differently.<sup>106</sup> While nature is internal and eternal, will is external and ephemeral. Having rejected the Origenist hierarchical worldview, he has to deal with the problem about the chasm between Creator and creatures. Here, we find that divine will is the first tool he has used to bridge the gap. Since divine nature is proper to God, it cannot be shared with the creation. What the creation can share is divine will only. On this base, Athanasius stresses that the Word of God moved and supported all the creatures and gave each their individual function in a single mere act of will (ἐνὶ καὶ ἀπλῶ νεύματι).<sup>107</sup> Another important concept relating to his doctrine of creation is the interpretation of existence. Following Origen, Athanasius defines reality (τὰ ὄντα), which has its exemplar in God, as good (τὰ καλὰ), and unreality (τὰ μὴ ὄντα), which has no real existence, as evil (τὰ φαῦλα).<sup>108</sup> To exist continuously, one must remain good.<sup>109</sup> This is a key idea governing the whole of Athanasius' soteriology, as we will see.

As A. Pettersen observes, Athanasius understood the nature of creation in light of God.<sup>110</sup> Since God is good and has no envy of anything, the created world was originally good and beautiful.<sup>111</sup> However, as the whole cosmos, including human beings, was created out of the chaotic void by divine will, and not by divine nature, its goodness, as well as its existence, is not everlasting. This means that it is by nature unstable (ῥευστή), weak (ἀσθενής) and mortal (θνητή). In order to prevent the universe from dissolving back

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<sup>102</sup> Florovsky, 'The Concept of Creation in Saint Athanasius,' p.43.

<sup>103</sup> Another reason of Athanasius' rejection of the pre-existence of the world is that it weakened the creating ability of God. Cf. *De Incarn.* 2 (Thomson, p.138). Actually, Athanasius was not the first Alexandrian bishop rejecting this Origenist concept. Some of his predecessors such as Dionysius and Peter had criticised it long before him. For a discussion of the Alexandrian theological trend after Origen, see Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, pp.149-157.

<sup>104</sup> *Ad Serap.* 1.28 (PG 26, col.596).

<sup>105</sup> *De Incarn.* 3-5 (Thomson, pp.138-146).

<sup>106</sup> For Origen's conception of divine nature and will, see Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology*, pp.47-58.

<sup>107</sup> *C. Gent.* 44 (Thomson, p.122).

<sup>108</sup> *C. Gent.* 4 (Thomson, p.10); *De Incarn.* 4 (Thomson, p.144).

<sup>109</sup> When talking about the situation of human beings in the beginning, Athanasius says, 'They are, as I said above, corruptible by nature, but by the grace of the participation of the Word they could have escaped from the consequences of their nature if they had remained good (μεμνήκεισαν καλοί).' *De Incarn.* 5 (Thomson, p.144).

<sup>110</sup> Pettersen, *Athanasius*, pp.19-30.

<sup>111</sup> *De Incarn.* 3 (Thomson, p.140).

into nothingness, after creating everything and bringing creation into existence, God continues to govern and establish the whole world through His eternal Λόγος, so that the entire creation may share in Him.<sup>112</sup> Since the creation cannot subsist by itself, it must be and is passively and continuously maintained by external divine power. Because of this, the Λόγος of God is present in all things and extends His power everywhere. He leaves nothing deprived of His power, but gives life and protection (ζωοποιῶν καὶ διαφυλάττων) to each individual.<sup>113</sup> In this way, Athanasius shares the Stoic view in suggesting that the whole universe is filled with something divine. On this point, K. Anatolios argues that the bishop corrected the Stoic materialistic pantheism with the Platonic concept of participation (μεταλαμβάνουσα).<sup>114</sup> However, speaking more precisely, I think what Athanasius actually did is shifting from divine nature to divine will. Instead of partaking divine nature, his creation is maintained by divine power under continuous divine will only. Since the whole world is now well created, guided and preserved by God, Athanasius insists that from the order (τάξις) and harmony (συμφωνία) of the cosmos one should also be able to think of its Maker, even if He is ontologically invisible to human eyes.<sup>115</sup> From the beauty of the world, no one can dispute the fact that the Triad is the sole Creator.<sup>116</sup>

It is worth noting that Athanasius has made here a clear distinction between the Son and the creation. While the Son is of the same essence as the Father, the universe is out of nothing. The Son was begotten and immortal by nature, whereas the world was created and maintained solely by the gracious will of God. Whilst the Son is always good, the goodness of the creation, and also its existence, is transitory. Since the Son is proper to the Father, He is essential to the Triad. However, as A. Pettersen comments, the creation being dependent entirely upon its Creator and Sustainer is recognised as having no rights or value in itself.<sup>117</sup> These contrasts reaffirm G. Florovsky's observation that the main demarcation line for Athanasius is between the Creator and the creation, and not between the Father and the Son as the Arians contended.<sup>118</sup> In addition to the Son and the creation, Athanasius also considers the Fatherhood and Creatorship of God as two totally different

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<sup>112</sup> *C. Gent.* 41 (Thomson, pp.112-114).

<sup>113</sup> *C. Gent.* 42 (Thomson, p.114).

<sup>114</sup> Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought*, pp.51-52.

<sup>115</sup> *C. Gent.* 35, 38 (Thomson, pp.94-96, 102-106). Athanasius writes clearly about this, 'The one who contemplates the creation rightly (ὁ τὴν κτίσιν ὀρθῶς θεωρῶν) is contemplating also the Word who framed it (τὸν ταύτην δημιουργήσαντα Λόγον), and through Him begins to apprehend the Father (δι' αὐτοῦ τὸν Πατέρα νοεῖν ἄρχεται).' *Or. Ar.* 1.12 (PG 26, col.36).

<sup>116</sup> Athanasius explains, 'As light is beautiful, the author of light, the sun, is more beautiful. Likewise, as it is something divine that the whole world is filled with knowledge of him, the author (ἀρχηγός) and instigator (ἡγέμων) of such an achievement must be God and the Word of God.' *C. Gent.* 1 (Thomson, p.4).

<sup>117</sup> Pettersen, *Athanasius*, p.23.

<sup>118</sup> Florovsky, 'The Concept of Creation in Saint Athanasius,' p.47.



categories. While a work is external to the nature, a son is the proper offspring (ἴδιον γέννημα) of the essence. A man may be called a maker (ποιητής) though the works are still fashioning in mind, but one cannot be called father unless a son really exists.<sup>119</sup> Since God is self-sufficient and not dependent on any external things, the creative act is not for the benefit of the Creator, but solely for the creatures.<sup>120</sup>

Being part of the wider creation, men are by nature also mortal (θνητός) and corruptible (φθαρτός). However, Athanasius deems that God has special pity for the human race. Seeing that by the definition of their own existence men will be unable to persist forever, He gave them an added grace (πλέον τι χαριζόμενος). He not simply created men like the rest of creation, but made them according to His own Image (κατὰ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ εἰκόνα) and gave them also a share in the power of His own Word (τῆς τοῦ ἰδίου Λόγου δυνάμεως). Being made partakers and given the shadows of the Λόγος, and thus made rational (λογικοὶ), human beings might be able to remain in felicity and live a paradisiacal life.<sup>121</sup> What then precisely does this added grace involve? In another passage, Athanasius writes that, besides creating men in His own image (εἰκόνα) through the Λόγος, God also made men perceptive (θεωρητὴν) and understanding (ἐπιστήμονα) of reality through their similarity to Him, and gave them a conception (ἐννοίαν) and knowledge (γνώσιν) of His own eternity (ἄιδιότητος). So, as long as men keep this likeness (ὁμοιότητα), they may never abandon this concept of God, but retaining the grace (χάριν) and special power (δύναμιν) of God they may rejoice and converse with Him.<sup>122</sup> From these descriptions, we know that the added grace here consists of three elements. The first one is divine image, which is the object of contemplation. The second one is basic divine knowledge, which Athanasius treats as a 'way' to God. The last one is man's rationality and ability to comprehend spiritual reality, which signify the contemplative power of the soul. This added grace causes man to be able to contemplate God and thus pursue good by himself. Different from the rest of creation, which is always sustained passively by divine power, man by grace was originally self-sufficient, and could actively maintain good and hence keep existent by constant divine contemplation. It is because of this ability to cling to divine reality that Athanasius declares that men are superior to sensual things (τῶν αἰσθητῶν) and all bodily impressions (πάσης σωματικῆς φαντασίας).<sup>123</sup>

Here, Athanasius' concept of divine image (εἰκὼν) is especially noteworthy. Following Origen, Athanasius believes that the human soul was created as 'image of the

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<sup>119</sup> *Or. Ar.* 1.29 (PG 26, col.72-73).

<sup>120</sup> Cf. Pettersen, *Athanasius*, p.25.

<sup>121</sup> *De Incarn.* 3 (Thomson, p.140).

<sup>122</sup> *C. Gent.* 2 (Thomson, p.6).

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*



divine Image.’ Just like an inclined mirror, the soul reflects the heavenly reality vertically above it to horizontal image that can be seen by man.<sup>124</sup> Since the Father is primarily invisible, God always reveals Himself to the soul through the Son, who is the outward expression of the Father. Being like a mirror, the soul reflects almost everything that is related to the Son. When discussing the explanation of some disputed biblical passages, Athanasius says, ‘For as of the Son of God, considered as the Λόγος, our reason (λόγος) is an image, so of the same Son considered as Σοφία is the wisdom (σοφία) which is implanted in us an image.’<sup>125</sup> Different from many other fathers, Athanasius does not limit man’s divine image to human reason (λόγος). Also, he departed from some of his predecessors in not making clear distinction between the terms *imago* and *similitudo*.<sup>126</sup> From the definition of divine image, we can now spot the second tool Athanasius uses to bridge the gap between Creator and creatures after rejecting the Origenist hierarchical cosmology. While God uses the first tool ‘divine will’ to approach men, men in turn may approach God through the second tool ‘divine image.’ When moving towards the divine image in the soul, man is at the same time intellectually ascending upwards to God.

In spite of the bestowal of added grace, which includes divine image, man is still by nature corruptible. What he possesses is not divine nature, but a special gift given by divine will only. It is basically a kind of power that causes him to be able to contemplate God and thus pursue good. Only when man keeps his goodness by using this power properly can he continue to persist. For this reason, Adam had his mind fixed (ἑσχηκέναι) on God in unembarrassed frankness (ἀνεπαίσχυντῳ παρρησίᾳ), and lived in the contemplation of intelligible reality (τῇ τῶν νοητῶν θεωρίᾳ) in the beginning. Athanasius calls such intelligible reality ‘paradise’.<sup>127</sup> Here, it should be noted that although paradise (παράδεισος) and heaven (οὐρανός) appear to be similar, there is difference between them. Whilst the former is basically a present joyful contemplative state, the latter is something to be realised after death. Immortality in heaven (ἡ ἐν οὐρανοῖς ἀφθαρσία) for earthly man is always a future promise (ἐπαγγελία).<sup>128</sup> How precisely they are related is rather obscure. There exists certain degree of tension in Athanasius’ system. It seems that, when a man is still living on earth, what is changeable is primarily his will. Possibly, having maintained goodness with human will, he can foretaste a little heavenly immortality, both intellectually and physically. However, only

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<sup>124</sup> Cf. *C. Gent.* 2, 8, 34 (Thomson, pp.6-8, 20, 94).

<sup>125</sup> *Or. Ar.* 2.78 (PG 26, col.312). Concerning this divine image, K. Anatolios suggests that it means men’s relation with God. Cf. Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought*, pp.65-66. According to our analysis, he seems to have oversimplified Athanasius’ concept on this issue.

<sup>126</sup> For general opinions of the fathers about the image of God, see J. L. Garrett, ‘Image of God,’ *EEChr* 1:560-561.

<sup>127</sup> *C. Gent.* 2 (Thomson, p.6).

<sup>128</sup> *De Incarn.* 3 (Thomson, p.140).

after his death can his human nature be truly transformed by God. In contrast with the Origenist pre-existent soul, the supreme task of Athanasian created man was not to advance from image to likeness, but to use the added grace properly so as to keep the image and likeness initially bestowed on him firmly till the end of his life.<sup>129</sup>

Athanasius explains clearly the necessity of proper use of the added grace at the beginning of his *Contra Gentes*. Here, he writes that the soul is a naturally mobile being, which does not cease to be in motion (κινεῖσθαι οὐ παύεται). Having been created autonomous (αὐτεξούσιος), it can incline to the good as well as turn away from it. Being in control of its bodily members, it can thus use them in both directions, for the pursuit of good reality (τὰ ὄντα) or of evil unreality (τὰ μὴ ὄντα). When the soul abandoned the contemplation of the good (τῆς πρὸς τὰ καλὰ θεωρίας) and the movement in it (τῆς ἐν αὐτοῖς κινήσεως), it was from then on deceived (πλανωμένη) and moved in the opposite direction (κινεῖται εἰς τὰ ἐναντία). Delighting in the contemplation of the body (τῇ τοῦ σώματος θεωρίᾳ), it mistakenly considered pleasure to be the really good thing. Consequently, it misused its abilities and moved its bodily members in the wrong direction as well. Here, Athanasius emphasises that the soul was in fact created not merely to move, but to move in the right direction.<sup>130</sup> Probably inspired by the famous image in Plato's *Phaedrus*, Athanasius analogises the soul as a charioteer (ἡνίοχος). However, instead of the three parts of the soul, he presents the charioteer and his two horses as the soul and the bodily members respectively. A soul that turns away from better things (τῶν κρείττονων) is just like a charioteer who disregards the goal (τοῦ σκοποῦ). No matter how hard he drives his horses, he cannot reach it. When the soul turns off the way to God (τὴν πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν ὁδόν) and drives (ἐλαύνουσα) the body's members beyond what is proper (παρὰ τὸ πρέπον), it errs and becomes out of the goal of truth (ἔξω τοῦ τῆς ἀληθείας σκοποῦ).<sup>131</sup>

In his view of the composition of human beings, Athanasius followed a traditional Platonic anthropology. He sees man as a combination of soul (ψυχή) and body (σῶμα). These two components have totally different natures. Body is mortal (θνητὸν) and transitory (πρόσκαιρόν), and soul is rational (λογικὴ) and immortal (ἀθάνατος). In this soul is one's rational mind (νοῦς), which governs the whole body so that each organ and limb can fulfil its own function without conflict.<sup>132</sup> However, as K. Anatolios noticed, this νοῦς is not explicitly differentiated by Athanasius from ψυχή.<sup>133</sup> For him, the rational soul

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<sup>129</sup> It should be noted that the meaning of 'likeness' here has changed. For Athanasius, man could not become like God in nature, but by progress in virtue imitate Him only. Cf. *Ad Afr.* 7 (PG 26, col.1041).

<sup>130</sup> *C. Gent.* 4 (Thomson, pp.10-12).

<sup>131</sup> *C. Gent.* 5 (Thomson, pp.12-14).

<sup>132</sup> *C. Gent.* 32 (Thomson, pp.86-88).

<sup>133</sup> Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought*, p.62.

is self-moving (ὕφ' ἑαυτῆς κινουμένη). It still moves itself and does not cease from living by the grace of God even after the burial of the body in the ground. Death only means the departure of one's soul from the body.<sup>134</sup> Following the contemporary Greek ideology, the bishop believes that only like can know like. Since the soul is immortal, it can think and reflect on things immortal and eternal. Athanasius asserts that only through this soul and the mind within it can God be seen and apprehended by human beings.<sup>135</sup> Since the idea of immortality has never left the soul, he emphasises that it is possible for the soul to contemplate and know God from itself.<sup>136</sup> To this point, one may immediately see that he has two different 'ways' of approach to God. One is through the divine knowledge remaining in the soul, and the other is through the contemplation of the order and harmony in the created world. Although both ways had been used by earlier thinkers, Athanasius, as A. Louth says, seems to have been the first Christian writer who combined the two models in one treatise.<sup>137</sup> How can man who is corruptible by nature have an immortal soul? Apparently, they are contradictory. However, one must note that the human soul here is actually not immortal by nature, but by grace of the participation of the Word only.<sup>138</sup> Such grace as stated before primarily refers to the power of contemplating God and pursuing good. For this reason, when men turned away from God and were deprived of this grace, they, including their souls, became mortal and corruptible again.<sup>139</sup> Concerning the nature of ψυχή and σῶμα, A. Pettersen has three good observations. Firstly, Athanasius' anthropological ideal is to maintain a right relationship between each human component. He rejects the antithesis of spirit and matter, of soul and body. Secondly, as other creatures, the soul is also created by the divine will. It is ontologically distinct from the divine Creator. Finally, the combination of soul and body is a good creation by God. There is neither a sense of the soul being punished nor of the soul being purified by embodiment.<sup>140</sup>

As we can see, Athanasius' doctrine of creation started from the biblical data with special consideration on what he believed to be the Nicene Christology. At the beginning of his *Contra Gentes*, he expresses clearly that his 'truth' is from the sacred and divinely inspired Scriptures (αἱ ἅγαι καὶ θεόπνευστοι γραφαί), and his purpose is to defend Christianity against the pagan challenge that faith in Christ is irrational (ἄλογον).<sup>141</sup> Clearly, the major concern of his rejection of Origenist hierarchical cosmology and the

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<sup>134</sup> *C. Gent.* 33 (Thomson, p.90).

<sup>135</sup> *C. Gent.* 30, 33 (Thomson, p.82, 92).

<sup>136</sup> *C. Gent.* 33 (Thomson, p.92).

<sup>137</sup> Louth, 'The Concept of the Soul in Athanasius' *Contra Gentes—De Incarnatione*, pp.229-230.

<sup>138</sup> *C. Gent.* 33 (Thomson, p.92). See also *De Incarn.* 5 (Thomson, p.144).

<sup>139</sup> *De Incarn.* 7 (Thomson, p.150).

<sup>140</sup> Pettersen, *Athanasius*, p.28.

<sup>141</sup> *C. Gent.* 1 (Thomson, p.2).

myth of pre-existence, and the subsequent adoption of *creatio ex nihilo* and other doctrines on creation, is his belief on the divinity of Christ. As R. P. C. Hanson claims, the relation of the Son to the Father is always at the centre of Athanasius' concern.<sup>142</sup> The doctrine of creation of Athanasius was designed mostly, or at least partly, to support his belief on the full divinity of the Son and to 'flesh out' the doctrine. In this task, he was successful. As G. Florovsky judges, there is 'a perfect consistency and coherence in his theological views.'<sup>143</sup>

K. Anatolios' 1998 volume on Athanasius analyses the coherence of his theology by relating various aspects of his doctrine to a pervasive emphasis on the distinction and simultaneous relation between God and the world, a topic closely related to the doctrine of creation. As shown in our present discussion, Athanasius' main concern is constantly the Son. Even in his polemical writings with the Arians, the majority of his discussion is undeniably concerned with Christology. The relationship between Creator and the 'valueless' creatures is only secondary to it. In Anatolios' book, some aspects of the bishop have been misread. For example, he regards virtue and holiness as mere gifts, which Christians offer back to God after receiving them as a gift from Him.<sup>144</sup> This suggestion has neglected the importance of asceticism and spiritual advancement in the teachings of Athanasius. Besides, he also cannot explain why the bishop chose the view of Irenaeus instead of his Alexandrian predecessor Origen.<sup>145</sup> Actually, the main problem of Anatolios' study is methodological. He tries to analyse all aspects of Athanasius' theology in terms of one single theme, basing his view on the inner structure of Athanasius' writings without considering his life situation in history. Anatolios' attempt is revolutionary, but unrealistic. As mentioned before, the spirituality of Athanasius was constituted and influenced by many factors. No single theme, even Christology, can exhaustively sum up the whole of his theology. However, in spite of these faults, Anatolios' work is still valuable. It helpfully illustrates how various doctrines are integrated and interrelated in Athanasius' system. On this account, since the subject is vast and the space here is limited, we are not going to repeat this process again.

## **B. Formation of Spiritual Teachings from Theological Conviction**

From his life experience, religious tradition and social culture, Athanasius developed his spirituality and theology. Based on them, he wrote his spiritual treatises and expressed his opinions on how a Christian should act and live in accordance with this

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<sup>142</sup> Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p.425.

<sup>143</sup> Florovsky, 'The Concept of Creation in Saint Athanasius,' p.53.

<sup>144</sup> Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought*, p.175.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.19-25. Instead of treating Athanasius' view as Irenaean, it is better to say that the doctrines of the two fathers are both based on the same biblical data.



theological conviction. Concerning these spiritual teachings, the most relevant and important one amongst various doctrines is obviously soteriology. As with other dogmatic themes, central to Athanasius' soteriology is what he believes to be the biblical data and the Nicene faith. About the former, C. Kannengiesser comments that the Hellenistic elitist and intellectualistic idea of a salvation assured to individuals according to their personal gifts and their abilities was replaced by Athanasius with a theory of the divine realities revealed by the Gospels. The Scriptural revelation was consistently the major source for his construction of the doctrine of salvation.<sup>146</sup> Concerning the Nicene faith, P. Widdicombe points out that the idea of sonship is central to Athanasius' soteriology. As the one who is Son of God by nature has become Son of Man, and has bestowed upon believers the Holy Spirit, He also enables them to become sons of the Father by adoption.<sup>147</sup> The role of the Son is very crucial here.

In church history, many models of soteriology may be found.<sup>148</sup> Amongst them, as M. Slusser notes, five models were popular in the earliest Christianity, all of which had their roots from the Scriptures. These five are: i) the identification of Jesus as the Messiah and the embodiment of the Day of the Lord; ii) the deliverance from the threat of death; iii) atonement that involved the forgiveness of sins; iv) the conviction of having personal relationship with God in Jesus; and finally v) the viewing of Jesus as the person above all others to be imitated.<sup>149</sup> Regarding the soteriological model of Athanasius, different opinions have been suggested. D. B. Brakke stresses that he has replaced the conventional theme of ignorance and knowledge with corruption and incorruption.<sup>150</sup> C. R. Strange argues that divinisation is important for him.<sup>151</sup> Amongst various proposals, J. N. D. Kelly seems to be more accurate in pointing out that Athanasius' soteriology is a mixture of several models. While its dominant strain is the physical theory that Christ by becoming man restored the divine image in men, the convictions that His death is necessary to release people from the curse of sin and that He offered Himself in sacrifice for men are also blended with it.<sup>152</sup> However, this observation is still incomplete. As we will see, Athanasius has tried, though not fully successfully, to integrate almost all the biblical saving models above into his system.

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<sup>146</sup> Kannengiesser, 'The Spiritual Message of the Great Fathers,' 1:63.

<sup>147</sup> Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius*, p.223.

<sup>148</sup> In his book, McIntyre lists thirteen models of soteriology. However, many of them were established by reformers and modern theologians. Cf. J. McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology: Studies in the Doctrine of the Death of Christ* (Edinburgh, 1992), chap.2.

<sup>149</sup> M. Slusser, 'Salvation,' *EEChr* 2:1023.

<sup>150</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, p.146.

<sup>151</sup> Strange, 'Athanasius on Divinization,' pp.342-346.

<sup>152</sup> Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrine*, pp.377-380.



From the very beginning, the Scriptures were seen in Greco-Roman culture as having many paradoxical tensions. These tensions not only caused acute debates concerning the doctrines of God and of Christ, but also brought about diversified views on soteriology. In addition to the saving models mentioned above, discussions were also focused on the relationship between divine salvation and human free will, of which the fifth-century controversy between Pelagius and Augustine is a representative example. On this point, Athanasius' soteriology, as G. D. Dragas remarked, may be seen as resting on two major premises. Firstly, on the thesis that only God can save, and secondly that salvation requires a human act. The reasons for the former are many, but the major one is connected with the headship of God, particularly the Son, in creation. The entire creation including men do not ultimately exist in themselves, but in the Λόγος who made them. The ground for the latter rests mainly on the 'added grace' for men, who are then made capable to acknowledge their Creator and participate in His life.<sup>153</sup> These two premises are expounded more fully below.

## 1. Divine Salvation

Based on what he conceived as the Scriptural information, Athanasius developed a soteriology coherent with his theological and cosmological system. For him, men's good condition changed radically as they turned their minds away from God in the fall. Being contemptuous of the intelligible reality, men began to consider themselves and seek bodily sensations. As a result, they gradually fell into selfish desires (ἐαυτῶν ἐπιθυμίαν) and preferred their own good (τὰ ἴδια) to the contemplation of the divine (τῆς πρὸς τὰ θεῖα θεωρίας). Being unwilling to turn away from worldly things, they imprisoned in the pleasures of the body (ταῖς τοῦ σώματος ἡδοναῖς) their souls, which had become disordered (τεταραγμένην) and defiled by all kinds of desires (πεφυρμένην πάσαις ἐπιθυμίαις). In the end their souls forgot the power they had received from God in the beginning.<sup>154</sup> Athanasius summarises the consequences of men's fall in an expository article, 'By his fall all things are in confusion: death prevailed from Adam to Moses (ὁ θάνατος ἴσχυεν ἀπὸ Ἀδὰμ μέχρι Μωϋσέως), the earth was cursed (ἡ γῆ κεκατήραται), hades was opened (ὁ ᾗδης ἠνοίγη), paradise shut (ὁ παράδεισος ἐκλείσθη), heaven offended (ὁ οὐρανὸς ἐθυμώθη), man, lastly, corrupted (ἐφθάρη) and brutalised (ἀπεκτηνώθη), while the devil was exulting against us (ὁ διάβολος ἐνῆλλετο καθ' ἡμῶν).'<sup>155</sup> As J. N. D. Kelly says, Athanasius teaches that the wretchedness of mankind is directly traceable to the first parents' lapse. It is through the fault committed by their free will that the disintegrating forces in any case latent in human nature were released. This

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<sup>153</sup> G. D. Dragas, 'A Note concerning Athanasius' Soteriology,' *Ath*, pp.145-147.

<sup>154</sup> *C. Gent.* 3 (Thomson, p.8).

<sup>155</sup> *Om. Tra.* 2 (PG 25, col.209-212).

is an idea with a long history, going back through Irenaeus to Paul.<sup>156</sup> About men's fall, one should note that in the mind of Athanasius Adam and his posterity, as G. D. Dragas stresses, sinned willingly and not by natural compulsion or any other kind of determinism. The crucial problem here is that of the human will.<sup>157</sup>

Athanasius' corollaries of the fall may be classified into seven categories. First, men became *ignorant of God*. In the lapse, men gradually forgot their conception and idea of God, and concentrated on visible phenomena only. As a result, they honoured non-existent beings and deified idols in place of the existent God.<sup>158</sup> Second, men became *enslaved by sin*. After turning their minds to secular things and finding that their desires could never obtain satisfaction, men learned to sin, such as murdering and committing injustice.<sup>159</sup> They quickly lost control and became unable to stop themselves from sinning.<sup>160</sup> Third, men were *condemned by the Law*. To prevent men from turning away, God secured the grace they had been given by giving them a law to keep and bringing them into his paradise. He warned them that if they transgressed and turned away from the law, they would suffer natural corruption and death, and would no longer live in paradise. Because men had eventually transgressed the law, they received divine condemnation.<sup>161</sup> Another punishment for transgressing God's commandment was *the banishment from the paradise*. In the beginning, human beings could enjoy the life of paradise, without grief, misery or trouble. After the fall of men, paradise shut.<sup>162</sup> Indeed, as mentioned before, 'paradise' is primarily for Athanasius a joyful contemplative state. In addition to a legal punishment, such banishment is also a natural consequence of men's turning away from God.<sup>163</sup> Furthermore, since fallen humanity had lost the power and the grace of God, they became weak and were easily *conquered by the devil*. In order to keep men from God, Satan frequently attacked them with deceit, persecution, threat and other wickedness. After the fall, the deceit of evil spirits cast a wide shadow everywhere and hid from humanity the knowledge of the true God.<sup>164</sup> In Athanasius' soteriology, the sixth consequence of the fall is *the fear of death*. As men increasingly concentrated on their bodily interests and other senses, they began to adopt such an

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<sup>156</sup> Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrine*, p.347. However, Athanasius has never hinted that human beings participated in Adam's actual guilt. He claimed for example that Jeremiah and John the Baptist had lived their lives entirely without sin. Cf. *Or. Ar.* 3.33 (PG 26, col.393).

<sup>157</sup> Dragas, 'A Note concerning Athanasius' Soteriology,' p.151.

<sup>158</sup> *C. Gent.* 8 (Thomson, pp.20-22); *De Incarn.* 11 (Thomson, p.160).

<sup>159</sup> *C. Gent.* 3 (Thomson, p.10). Based on church's teaching, Athanasius believes that evil and sin is something not created by God, but devised by men themselves. Cf. *C. Gent.* 7 (Thomson, p.18).

<sup>160</sup> *De Incarn.* 5 (Thomson, p.146).

<sup>161</sup> *De Incarn.* 3-4 (Thomson, pp.140-144).

<sup>162</sup> *De Incarn.* 3 (Thomson, p.140).

<sup>163</sup> Cf. *C. Gent.* 3 (Thomson, p.6).

<sup>164</sup> *De Incarn.* 13 (Thomson, p.164).

attitude that they were afraid of losing them. Being unwilling to abandon these desires, the human soul has come to fear death and separation from the body.<sup>165</sup> Lastly, men as a corollary of the fall *became mortal and corruptible*. For Athanasius, this corruption has two main causes. On the one hand, as men were summoned to existence by the advent and mercy of the Λόγος, their separation from God and moving away from goodness unavoidably turned them back to their own corruptible nature.<sup>166</sup> On the other hand, corruption was also one of the punishments of men's transgression of God's law.<sup>167</sup>

How then was men's added grace, as well as the divine image, affected by the fall? If Athanasius suggests that men had been deprived of the grace of being in the image, why does he say that the thoughts and ideas about immortality never leave the soul but remain in it?<sup>168</sup> As mentioned before, added grace for the bishop primarily refers to the power for contemplating God and thus pursuing good. To understand the influence of the fall, we must look carefully how Athanasius depicts the process. According to the description at the beginning of the *C. Gent.*, the loss of such power is not an immediate consequence of men's turning away from God, but is a later result after long period of treachery when the soul had become disordered and defiled by all kinds of desires.<sup>169</sup> This means that what causes men to lose the added grace is not initial perfidy, but the subsequent disorder and defilement of the soul. As we have seen, the added grace consists of three primary elements: divine image, basic divine knowledge, and the ability to comprehend spiritual reality. While the first one is damaged and the second is forgotten in the fall, the third is apparently not seriously affected. The human soul is for the bishop like a mirror, which reflects heavenly reality for men to see. Divine image includes almost all the similarities men have with God. Just like something deforming and covering the mirror surface, disorder and defilement disable the soul and cause the reflected image to be distorted or even to disappear. Since men now can no longer rightly contemplate God and pursue good through the reflected image of the soul, the added grace may be said to have been lost. However, since the ideas of immortality have never left the soul but are forgotten only, Athanasius writes that the soul is still its own 'way' (ὁδός).<sup>170</sup> It seems that in the fall men had forgotten the divine knowledge so thoroughly that they lost even the intention of turning back to God through the 'mirror.' On this point, K. Anatolios is possibly right in pointing out that the sinful humanity is incapable

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<sup>165</sup> *C. Gent.* 3 (Thomson, pp.8-10).

<sup>166</sup> *De Incarn.* 4 (Thomson, pp.142-144).

<sup>167</sup> *De Incarn.* 5 (Thomson, p.144). Although Athanasius sometimes mixed the words death (θάνατος) and corruption (φθορά) together, they have different basic meaning. While death means departure of the soul from the body and is not fearful, corruption mutates men back to non-existence and is really terrible.

<sup>168</sup> Cf. *De Incarn.* 7 (Thomson, p.150); *C. Gent.* 33 (Thomson, p.92).

<sup>169</sup> *C. Gent.* 3 (Thomson, p.8).

<sup>170</sup> *C. Gent.* 33 (Thomson, p.92).

of renewing its relationship with God by its own powers. Athanasius nowhere suggests that men may return to God without the grace of Christ.<sup>171</sup> Thus, he is soteriologically in an opposite position against Pelagianism.

Athanasius deems that only the Son can redeem the human race from the fall. In his theology, the salvation brought by Christ plays a very consequential role. As Robertson says, the incarnation of the Son, and especially his death on the cross, is to the bishop the centre of faith and theology.<sup>172</sup> For him, the cross (ὁ σταυρός) is not the ruin (μὴ βλάβη) but the salvation of creation (θεραπεία τῆς κτίσεως).<sup>173</sup> Parallel with his doctrine of creation, Athanasius suggests that it is the Son's task to bring what was corruptible (φθαρτὸν) back again to incorruption (ἀφθαρσίαν). He alone is both able to recreate the universe, be worthy to suffer for all and be an advocate on behalf of all before the Father.<sup>174</sup> Athanasius makes numerous points about the necessity and reasons of the salvific acts of Christ. As the logic and coherence of his soteriological system has been discussed by many modern scholars, we do not analyse his arguments one by one here.<sup>175</sup>

Based on what he believes to be the biblical data, Athanasius tried to integrate different saving models in his doctrinal treatises. These models were as H. Hess stated provided for the most part by the traditional teaching which the bishop himself received at Alexandria. Most of them are familiar biblical motifs developed during the apostolic period.<sup>176</sup> Some of these models are more central and some are comparatively peripheral. Because of the variance in practical needs, they are variously emphasised in different works. For example, in his early apologetic treatises written to the pagans, the popular saving themes of knowledge are discussed more. In his anti-Arian writings where the divinity of the Son is the central concern, Christ's function as the mediator joining men to God is stressed. To encourage his flock to walk on the way to God, the motif of men's ascension into heaven is employed frequently in his spiritual treatises. Although Athanasius has not written specifically about their interrelationship, these models are certainly inseparable to each other. While some coincide, some follow and subordinate another. Since the soteriological system is crucial for our understanding of Athanasius' spiritual teachings, it is further discussed here.

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<sup>171</sup> Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought*, pp.66-67.

<sup>172</sup> Robertson, *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius*, p.lxix.

<sup>173</sup> *C. Gent.* 1 (Thomson, p.4).

<sup>174</sup> *De Incarn.* 7 (Thomson, p.150). Athanasius frequently parallels salvation with creation. He says for example, 'For it was fitting that while "through Him" (δι' αὐτοῦ) all things came into being at the beginning, "in Him" (ἐν αὐτῷ) all things should be set right.' *Om. Tra.* 2 (PG 25, col.212).

<sup>175</sup> For various discussions about the logicalness and coherence of Athanasius' soteriological system, see M. Wiles, 'In Defence of Arius,' *JThS* NS 13 (1962):339-347; Strange, 'Athanasius on Divinization,' pp.342-346; Dragas, 'A Note concerning Athanasius' Soteriology,' pp.145-155; and Anatolios' *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought*.

<sup>176</sup> Hess, 'The Place of Divinization in Athanasius Soteriology,' p.371.



## a) Foundation of the Whole Salvation

The most crucial event in Christ's salvation is His incarnation, which joins men to God. To save men from the fallen situation, the Λόγος first became a man so that what He would achieve might be transferred to men. All other salvific functions are in certain extent based on it. As we will see, it is because the divine Λόγος had become a man that He might die on behalf of all and pay the debt for men's transgression of the law. It is because the immortal Λόγος was in man that death might be abolished in his crucifixion and resurrection. It is because the incorporeal Λόγος had put on a human body that men might regain the knowledge of God through His works. It is also because the heavenly Λόγος had condescended to the earth that He might ascend and reopen for men a way up to heaven. Incarnation is the foundation of the whole salvation of Christ. The necessity of Christ's incarnation is emphasised everywhere in Athanasius' writings. According to the prologue of *De Incarnatione*, it is clear that the whole treatise was composed to discuss the reason for the Word's incarnation.<sup>177</sup> This theme is further analysed in his later treatises, especially the *Orationes contra Arianos*. To defend the full divinity of the Son, Athanasius discusses at length the interrelationship between Christ's human behaviour and His divine manifestation.<sup>178</sup> He writes explicitly that the reason for His incarnate presence (ἡ αἰτία τῆς ἐνσάρκου παρουσίας αὐτοῦ) is 'to give a witness, and for our sakes to undergo death, to raise man up and destroy the works of the devil.'<sup>179</sup> It is because of the divine-human union in the incarnate Christ that various salvific functions might become achievable and effective. If the works of the divine Word had not taken place through the body, man had not been deified. Similarly, if the properties of the flesh had not been ascribed to the Word, man had not been thoroughly delivered from them.<sup>180</sup> For man to be deified, he must be joined to God and hence the Son must be very God.<sup>181</sup>

Following the incarnation process was a crucial change in the interrelation between God and men. As explained before, having abandoned the Origenist hierarchical worldview, Athanasius has used two tools, divine will and divine image, to bridge the gap between Creator and creatures. They are by definition external to God. However, in the incarnation, the Son who is God by nature came to the creation. This third bridging

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<sup>177</sup> *De Incarn.* 1 (Thomson, p.134).

<sup>178</sup> *Or. Ar.* 3.26-58 (PG 26, col.377-445).

<sup>179</sup> *Or. Ar.* 2.55 (PG 26, col.261-264).

<sup>180</sup> *Or. Ar.* 3.33 (PG 26, col.393). See also *Or. Ar.* 3.40 (PG 26, col.409).

<sup>181</sup> *Or. Ar.* 2.70 (PG 26, col.296). Concerning the insistence of redemption by a fully divine saviour, as K. Anatolios observes, salvation is for the bishop primarily and ultimately a matter of being 'joined' to God. His operative principle is that a creature cannot properly be said to join another creature to God, for only God can join creation to Himself. Through the incarnation, humanity was allowed to join to the Λόγος. However, if He was not fully divine, human beings could at most be joined to the incarnate saviour, and not God Himself. The view is not baseless. Cf. Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought*, p.126.



tool decisively broke the barrier between divinity and humanity, and closely linked them together. As illustrated by K. Anatolios, such relationship is for the bishop not only recovered but also advanced by the incarnation. It is the climax of the movement of God's χάρις which acts to mitigate the natural distance between the Creator and the creatures.<sup>182</sup> In the original creation, the Word was 'in essence (κατ' οὐσίαν) outside the universe but in everything by his power (ταῖς ἐαυτοῦ δυνάμεσι).'<sup>183</sup> In other words, God remained essentially distinct from the human body. For this reason, Athanasius describes the first created man Adam as 'having received grace (χάριν) from outside (ἔξωθεν) and not having it united (συνηρμοσμένην) to the body (τῷ σώματι).'<sup>184</sup> However, in the incarnation, the Word made the body His own (ἴδιον) such that divine life came to be in (ἐν) the humanity.<sup>185</sup> The distinction between divine and human was thus bridged, and men were made appropriate to and united with God.

With the above concept in mind, Athanasius wrote, 'By the condescension (συγκαταβάντος) of the Word, the creation too is made a son (υἱοποιεῖται) through Him.'<sup>186</sup> The most important motif Athanasius employed here is adoption. In the incarnation of the Word, the human race was bestowed with the Spirit of the Son. Because of the partaking of the Spirit, men became divine (θεός) by grace and might be called sons of God (υἱοὶ Θεοῦ) by adoption.<sup>187</sup> Concerning this χάρις, which conjoins personally God and man, it is noteworthy that, as G. D. Dragas remarked, it rests on the person of Christ the God-man.<sup>188</sup> Through faith in Christ, men may receive from Him the Spirit, by whom they are knit into the Godhead.<sup>189</sup> Functionally, this indwelling of the Spirit is the fourth tool Athanasius used to bridge the gap between Creator and creation. In the beginning, God approached the creation through divine will, and graciously bestowed on men divine image so that they might approach Him as well. Likewise, in the salvation, God came to the world through the incarnate Son, and graciously bestowed on men the Spirit, who is like the Son divine by nature. Here, it should be noted that the Spirit is not a substitute of men's original divine image, but is a supplement or a helper only. He helps to stabilise the unstable human nature. In addition to acting as a seal for Christ's redemption and victory, it seems that the Spirit also assists believers to use the 'mirror' in their soul to approach God and renders the ascending way easy. Like Origen's human spirit, Athanasius' Spirit is the divine teacher for human soul. However, He was

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<sup>182</sup> Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought*, pp.83-84, 131-133.

<sup>183</sup> *De Incarn.* 17 (Thomson, p.174).

<sup>184</sup> *Or. Ar.* 2.68 (PG 26, col.292).

<sup>185</sup> *Or. Ar.* 3.31 (PG 26, col.389).

<sup>186</sup> *Or. Ar.* 2.64 (PG 26, col.284).

<sup>187</sup> *Or. Ar.* 2.59 (PG 26, col.272-273); *De Decretis* 14 (PG 25, col.448).

<sup>188</sup> G. D. Dragas, 'Nature and Grace according to Saint Athanasius,' *Ath*, p.142.

<sup>189</sup> *Or. Ar.* 3.24 (PG 26, col.373).

not bestowed on men in the beginning, but after the salvation of Christ only.<sup>190</sup> Such divine aids on men's effort to heaven may be seen clearly in the life of Antony.<sup>191</sup>

## b) Two Major Salvific Functions

Amongst various treatises, the best illustration showing Athanasius' soteriological system is *De Incarnatione*. While other doctrinal writings are mostly composed for particular apologetic purposes and thus partial and fragmentary in nature, the discussion of this treatise about the salvific acts of Christ is more complete and systematic. At the very beginning, Athanasius states explicitly that this work was written to 'tell of the incarnation of the Word (περὶ τῆς ἐνανθρωπήσεως τοῦ Λόγου) and expound his divine manifestation to us (περὶ τῆς θείας αὐτοῦ πρὸς ἡμᾶς ἐπιφανείας).'<sup>192</sup> The entire treatise may be divided into three main sections, which discuss respectively the incarnation of the Word (2-18), the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ (19-32), and the faults of the Jews and the Gentiles (33-55).

According to this treatise, on top of the divine-human union in the incarnation, the salvation of Christ has two main functions. The first one is to deliver men from the threat of death and corruption. On this point, Athanasius explains that when men had turned away from the understanding of God, they received the condemnation of death. The transgression of the commandment turned them to their original corruptible nature.<sup>193</sup> Because of the offence of the law, even repentance (μετάνοια) could give no exemption from the consequences of nature, but could merely loose sins.<sup>194</sup> Having pity on human race, the incorruptible Word came to the created world, took a human body, and surrendered it to death on behalf of all, so that men's debt to the law might be fulfilled.<sup>195</sup> Since the Word is by nature incorruptible, corruption ceases from all men by the grace of the resurrection.<sup>196</sup> The second function of the incarnation of Christ is to reveal divine knowledge to men. From the very beginning, God manifests Himself through the bestowal of His own image, the works of creation, and the messages of the law and the prophets.<sup>197</sup> However, being overcome by their present desires and deceits of demons, men did not look towards the truth. Since men's reason had descended to sensible things, in order to save men from ignorance, the Word came as a man so that men by the works

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<sup>190</sup> Athanasius frequently calls the Spirit 'unction' (χρίσμα) and 'seal' (σφραγίς). Quoting 1 Jn. 2:27, he writes that the Spirit is the unction that teaches believers about all things. Cf. *Ad Serap.* 1.23 (PG 26, col.584-585).

<sup>191</sup> *V. Ant.* 5-10 (SC 400, pp.142-164).

<sup>192</sup> *De Incarn.* 1 (Thomson, p.134).

<sup>193</sup> *De Incarn.* 4 (Thomson, p.142).

<sup>194</sup> *De Incarn.* 7 (Thomson, p.150).

<sup>195</sup> *De Incarn.* 8 (Thomson, p.152).

<sup>196</sup> *De Incarn.* 9 (Thomson, p.154).

<sup>197</sup> *De Incarn.* 12 (Thomson, p.162).

done through the body might know the Son and through Him the Father.<sup>198</sup> Athanasius summarises at the end of the first section, 'In two ways our Saviour had compassion through the incarnation. Firstly, He rid us of death (τὸν θάνατον ἐξ ἡμῶν ἠφάνιζε) and renewed us (ἀνεκαίειν ἡμᾶς). Secondly, although He is invisible and indiscernible, yet by His works (διὰ τῶν ἔργων) He revealed (ἐνέφαινε) and made Himself known (ἐγνώριεν ἑαυτὸν) to be the Son of God and the Word of the Father, leader and king of the universe.'<sup>199</sup>

Apparently, these two functions are separate, but equally important. However, if one looks carefully at the argument in the second section of the treatise, one may find that they are actually interrelated. Focusing on the end of Christ's bodily life (τὸ τέλος τῆς ἐν σώματι διαγωγῆς),<sup>200</sup> Athanasius tries to answer here many assumed queries: Why is it necessary for Christ to die and resurrect? It is because through these acts the death of all might be fulfilled, and death and corruption might be destroyed.<sup>201</sup> Why did He not die privately? He died in front of witnesses in order that no one might deny His death and resurrection.<sup>202</sup> Why did He die on the cross? The Lord was crucified in the air so that He might overthrow the devil, purify the air, and open for men the way up to heaven (τὴν εἰς οὐρανοὺς ἄνοδον).<sup>203</sup> Why is it necessary for Christ to resurrect on the third day? He wanted to demonstrate to all that the body was truly dead and truly resurrected.<sup>204</sup> Because of His salvific acts, death is no longer to be feared, but believers tread on it as something non-existent and would rather die than deny their faith in Christ.<sup>205</sup> At first sight, Athanasius is talking about death and corruption here. He has used that kind of vocabulary numerous times here and has explained Christ's victory over death repeatedly. However, what is the purpose of such discussions? At the beginning of this section, the bishop states clearly that he gives such descriptions 'in order that you may know (ἵνα γνῶς) that particularly from this Christ is known to be God and the Son of God.'<sup>206</sup> Such theme was repeated throughout the section. Christ's courage in facing the plotting of the Jews 'demonstrated (ἐγνώριεν) that He is Saviour and life.'<sup>207</sup> He performed miracles, including resurrection, in front of others 'in order that through these things He might be believed (πιστευθῇ) to be the Word of God.'<sup>208</sup> He accepted and

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<sup>198</sup> *De Incarn.* 15-16 (Thomson, pp.170-172).

<sup>199</sup> *De Incarn.* 16 (Thomson, p.172).

<sup>200</sup> *De Incarn.* 19 (Thomson, p.180).

<sup>201</sup> *De Incarn.* 20 (Thomson, pp.182-184).

<sup>202</sup> *De Incarn.* 23 (Thomson, p.190).

<sup>203</sup> *De Incarn.* 25 (Thomson, p.194).

<sup>204</sup> *De Incarn.* 26 (Thomson, pp.196-198).

<sup>205</sup> *De Incarn.* 27 (Thomson, p.198).

<sup>206</sup> *De Incarn.* 19 (Thomson, p.180).

<sup>207</sup> *De Incarn.* 22 (Thomson, p.188).

<sup>208</sup> *De Incarn.* 23 (Thomson, p.190).

endured on the cross that inflicted by the enemies ‘in order that when it had been destroyed He might be believed (πιστευθῇ) to be life.’<sup>209</sup> He waited one extra day before resurrection ‘in order that the body might be shown (δειχθῇ) to be dead.’<sup>210</sup> For Athanasius, Christ’s victory over death ‘is demonstrated (γνώρισμα) in no uncertain manner and is clearly credible by the fact that it [death] is despised by all Christ’s disciples.’<sup>211</sup> What does such victory over death imply? The bishop writes clearly, ‘Even so when death has been despised and crushed since the saving manifestation (σωτήριος ἐπιφάνεια) of the Saviour in the body and His death on the cross, it is clear (πρόδηλον) that He is the Saviour.’<sup>212</sup> The victory over death is regarded here as a powerful proof of the divinity of Jesus. Athanasius recapitulates at the end of his discussions, ‘Since, therefore, the demons confess and His works bear witness every day, it should be clear (φανερὸν)—and let no one obstinately resist the truth—that the Saviour raised up His body, and that He is the true Son of God.’<sup>213</sup> Instead of physical death and corruption, the major focus of this section is the divine revelation of Christ. No matter how important it is, the former is here only an argument supporting the latter.

In the third section, Athanasius turns to refute the unbelief of the Jews (τὴν ἀπιστίαν τῶν Ἰουδαίων) and the mockery of the Greeks (τὴν τῶν Ἑλλήνων χλεύην).<sup>214</sup> To the Jews, he gives a series of biblical quotations and points out that the whole Scripture is full of witnesses of Christ. It should be clear (δῆλον) even to those who are extremely obstinate that Christ has come and that He has illuminated (καταλάμπαντα) all with His light and imparted (διδάξαντα) the true and divine teaching about His Father.<sup>215</sup> To the Greeks, he provides a series of logical arguments and disputes that incarnation is not something unreasonable according to contemporary philosophy. Just as He is known in creation through His works, it is suitable that the Word of God used a body as an instrument for the manifestation of truth (φανέρωσιν ἀληθείας) and declaration of the Father (γνώσιν τοῦ Πατρός).<sup>216</sup> Since such body was close to men, it would be more possible for them to know God through it.<sup>217</sup> The Saviour did the salvific acts in order that He might fill the universe with knowledge about Himself (τὰ πάντα τῆς περὶ αὐτοῦ γνώσεως πληρώσει) and that no one might be able to err any more (μηκέτι τις ἀπατηθῆναι

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<sup>209</sup> *De Incarn.* 24 (Thomson, p.192).

<sup>210</sup> *De Incarn.* 26 (Thomson, p.198).

<sup>211</sup> *De Incarn.* 27 (Thomson, p.198).

<sup>212</sup> *De Incarn.* 29 (Thomson, p.204).

<sup>213</sup> *De Incarn.* 32 (Thomson, p.212). Also, he says, ‘For since the Saviour works so many deeds amongst men...Is it the mark of a dead man to spur the minds of men (τὰς διανοίας τῶν ἀνθρώπων) so that they deny their father’s laws and revere the teaching of Christ?’ *De Incarn.* 30 (Thomson, pp.206-208).

<sup>214</sup> *De Incarn.* 33 (Thomson, p.214).

<sup>215</sup> *De Incarn.* 40 (Thomson, p.234).

<sup>216</sup> *De Incarn.* 42 (Thomson, p.240).

<sup>217</sup> *De Incarn.* 43 (Thomson, p.242).

δυνήθη).<sup>218</sup> The demonstration of virtue in the virgins of Christ, the banishment of demonic power, the conversion of many heathens, and the victory of Christianity over paganism are all powerful proofs of the veracity of Christian doctrine that Christ is the Son of God.<sup>219</sup> At the end of these refutations, Athanasius concludes, ‘After the Word of God was revealed (ἐπεφάνη) in the body and made known (ἐγνώρισεν) to us His Father, the deceit of the demons disappears and vanishes...This is a proof (γνώρισμα) that Christ is God the Word and the Power of God.’<sup>220</sup> All things point to a fact that God has revealed Himself through the works of the incarnate Christ. Again, divine revelation is in the central position.

A similar pattern also appears in his *Orationes contra Arianos*. Being composed mainly for apologetic purposes, this treatise deals specifically with some arguments raised by the Arians. However, whenever the author talks about the salvation of the incarnate Christ, the physical theme and intellectual theme are put together, but with the latter being emphasised more. At the end of the second discourse, Athanasius writes clearly that the incarnate Word, ‘after abolishing death (θάνατον) and saving human race, still more revealed (ἀπεκάλυψεν) Himself and through Him His own Father.’<sup>221</sup> Then he further explains, ‘Hence, the whole earth is filled with the knowledge of Him (τῆς γνώσεως αὐτοῦ), for the knowledge of Father through Son and of Son from Father is one and the same.’<sup>222</sup> Likewise, in the third discourse, when deliberating the implication of certain biblical texts relating to Christ’s incarnation, Athanasius tries to explain the reason why the Word became flesh.<sup>223</sup> Here, he answers, ‘He came amongst us from Mary once at the end of the ages for the abolition of sin (ἀθέτησιν ἁμαρτίας)...so that it might be shown (δειχθῇ) and that all might believe (πάντες πιστεύσωμεν), that He was ever God, hallowed those to whom He came, and ordered all things according to the Father’s will.’<sup>224</sup> Then, he spends a few passages to expound the physical theme. The Word became man and destroyed death and corruption. Having risen according to His power, men might abide ever immortal (ἄθάνatoi) and incorruptible (ἄφθαρτοι).<sup>225</sup> After that, Athanasius turns immediately to the intellectual theme. He discuss this topic with lengths over triple that of the physical one. Here, the bishop declares explicitly that the all-holy

<sup>218</sup> *De Incarn.* 45 (Thomson, p.248).

<sup>219</sup> *De Incarn.* 46-53 (Thomson, pp.250-268).

<sup>220</sup> *De Incarn.* 55 (Thomson, p.272). Also, Athanasius writes, ‘So just as if someone wishes to see God, who is invisible by nature and in no way visible, he understands and knows Him from His works, so he who does not see Christ with his mind, let him learn of Him from the works of His body, and let him test whether they be human or of God.’ *De Incarn.* 54 (Thomson, p.268).

<sup>221</sup> *Or. Ar.* 2.81 (PG 26, col.320).

<sup>222</sup> *Or. Ar.* 2.82 (PG 26, col.320).

<sup>223</sup> *Or. Ar.* 3.27 (PG 26, col.380).

<sup>224</sup> *Or. Ar.* 3.31 (PG 26, col.388-389).

<sup>225</sup> *Or. Ar.* 3.33 (PG 26, col.393).



Word of God endured all things for our sakes so that carrying our ignorance (τὴν ἄγνοιαν ἡμῶν) He might vouchsafe to us the knowledge of His own only and true Father and of Himself.<sup>226</sup> He argues eagerly that the Son knew all things as well as His own Father.<sup>227</sup> The Lord knows what is good for us beyond ourselves. It is for our advantage (συμφέρον) that He appeared to be ignorant.<sup>228</sup>

Undeniably, a major difference between the soteriological system of Athanasius and that of his Alexandrian predecessors is his supplement of the physical theory. While ‘knowledge’ was a popular and commonly accepted saving theme, ‘corruption’ was relatively new and strange for the contemporary readers. Athanasius seems to have been well aware of it. Before presenting his physical salvific model, he specifically explains its background by sharing his own doctrine of creation. He says at the beginning of *De Incarnatione*, ‘But as we proceed in our exposition of this, we must first speak about the creation of the universe (περὶ τῆς τῶν ὅλων κτίσεως) and its creator, God (τοῦ ταύτης δημιουργοῦ Θεοῦ).’<sup>229</sup> After a brief description of his distinct cosmological vision, Athanasius restates, ‘Perhaps you are wondering why, when we proposed to speak about the incarnation of the Word, we are now treating of the beginning of mankind (περὶ τῆς ἀρχῆς τῶν ἀνθρώπων). But this is not irrelevant to the purpose of our exposition.’<sup>230</sup> This arrangement suggests that doctrine of creation out of nothing is a major factor causing Athanasius to raise the question of corruption and impose it onto the traditional soteriology. As explained before, due to his insistence on full divinity of the Son, Athanasius has forsaken Origen’s teachings on hierarchical cosmology and the pre-existence of the souls, and adopted a doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*.<sup>231</sup> Corresponding to this change, it is necessary for him to modify the old Alexandrian saving model by supplementing it with a corruption theme so that the whole theological system may become more consistent and coherent. Since man is now no longer regarded as pre-existent, but non-existent in the beginning, he is time variant. This usually implies that man is corruptible by nature and needs external aids to stabilise his existence. As everything in the world was created out of nothing as well, Athanasius proposes that the whole creation, including men, was aided by the divine Word to exist. It was His power and grace that caused men to persist. The relation with God is very decisive for the persistent existence of men.<sup>232</sup> It unavoidably follows that, as mentioned before, when men turned away from God and damaged their original goodness in the fall, they

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<sup>226</sup> *Or. Ar.* 3.38 (PG 26, col.405).

<sup>227</sup> *Or. Ar.* 3.46 (PG 26, col.421).

<sup>228</sup> *Or. Ar.* 3.49-50 (PG 26, col.428).

<sup>229</sup> *De Incarn.* 1 (Thomson, p.136).

<sup>230</sup> *De Incarn.* 4 (Thomson, p.142).

<sup>231</sup> See part A.2.b of this chapter.

<sup>232</sup> *C. Gent.* 41 (Thomson, p.114); *De Incarn.* 3 (Thomson, p.140).

gradually became corruptible again. Under this condition, it is necessary for Athanasius to include a physical salvific model in his soteriology so that such corruption problem might be solved. If he did not add this new theme, salvation would be incomplete and loose end would be found. The supplement of a physical salvific model is a necessary result of the insistence on full divinity of the Son and the subsequent adoption of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. Once again, we see that Christology is ultimately the main cause shaping the formation of other doctrines in Athanasius' theological system.

As we can see, although Athanasius has tried to integrate death and corruption theme into his soteriology and made it parallel with the old Alexandrian theme of divine knowledge in the first section of *De Incarnatione* as well as in various passages of the *Orationes contra Arianos*, he unavoidably has to shift back to the traditional one in his later discussions. Both the lengths in the treatises and their interrelationship show that the intellectual model is indeed more crucial than the physical one. While the entire second section of *De Incarnatione* talks about the self-revelation of the incarnate Word, the third one discusses mainly the reasonableness and suitableness of such revelation. Over two-third of the treatise is on the intellectual theme. Christ's abolition of death and corruption is in these two sections only one of the divine revelations made through His body. Similarly, the discussions of the intellectual theme in the *Orationes contra Arianos* are much longer than that of the physical one. As mentioned before, for Athanasius to exist is to be good. Corruption is a natural consequence of men's turning their minds away from God, which implies abandonment of goodness. In the lapsarian events, the latter always precedes the former. Divine contemplation, as well as the subsequent pursuit of good, accordingly is more fundamental than death and corruption. What the bishop actually did is not changing radically the intellectual tradition, but just adding one more result for the ignorance and knowledge of men. In terms of soteriology, Athanasius in certain extent may still be said to be a follower of Clement and Origen. He modifies the conventional teachings only to make the whole theological system more consistent. On this point, some scholars such as D. B. Brakke argue that Athanasius has replaced the traditional theme of knowledge with corruption.<sup>233</sup> However, according to our previous discussion, it seems that he has just supplemented the original intellectual theme with physical elements. Divine knowledge remains at the centre of his soteriology.

Indeed, if one compares the use of vocabulary, one may find that Athanasius has actually shifted more to the intellectual theme in his later treatises. For example, words with the same root as γνῶσις and φθορά appear respectively 42 and 73 times in total in *De Incarnatione*, compared with 39 and 20 times in the *Orationes contra Arianos*. The ratio

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<sup>233</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, p.146.

has increased from 0.58 to 1.95.<sup>234</sup> Likewise, while the emergence of words of the same root as θάνατος has dropped from 192 times in the former to 88 times in the latter, that of φανέρωσις and ἀποκάλυψις has respectively risen from 17 to 43 times and 3 to 23 times.<sup>235</sup> In *Orationes contra Arianos*, Athanasius stresses repeatedly that the knowledge (γνώσις) of Son is the same as that of the Father. Beholding (βλέποντες) the Son, we see (ὁρῶμεν) the Father as well.<sup>236</sup> From His works (ἐκ τῶν ἔργων) He revealed (ἐγνώριζεν) both Himself as Son of God, and His own Father.<sup>237</sup> Christ's renewal of men's divine knowledge is highly emphasised here. Based on Athanasius' writings, the two salvific functions of the incarnate Christ are individually discussed below.

#### i) Restoration of Incorruptibility

As mentioned before, the corruption of men in the fall has two main causes: the transgression of the law and the separation from God. Following the first cause is a saving model of the atonement of Christ. For Athanasius, the corruption as a curse of transgression of God's commandment of men would not be abolished in any other way except by everyone dying (τοῦ πάντως ἀποθανεῖν). Since God was not willing to allow every man to die and to recreate the whole universe from nothing again, the Λόγος came and fulfilled the requirement of the law for men.<sup>238</sup> Surrendering the body to death on behalf of all (ἀντὶ πάντων), the Son offered it to the Father (προσῆγε τῷ Πατρί) as a ransom (λύτρον) for men's sin. The law's power of death is thus concluded (πληρωθείσης) in the Lord's body and will never have influence over men again.<sup>239</sup> The major motif Athanasius used for this salvific achievement is substitution, or more precisely sacrifice. As an offering (ιερείον) and sacrifice (θῦμα) free of all spot, the Word offered to death the body which He had taken to Himself, and abolished death from all who are like Him by the offering of a like (τῇ προσφορᾷ τοῦ καταλλήλου). Since the Word is above all (ὑπὲρ πάντας), instead of one victim for another, He can fulfil the debt (ὀφειλόμενον) of all by offering His body as a substitute (ἀντίψυχον).<sup>240</sup> Athanasius' underlying thought is, as J.

<sup>234</sup> In *De Incarnatione* and *Orationes contra Arianos*, the Greek word γνώσις appears respectively 16 & 18 times, γνωρίζω 26 & 14 times, ἄγνοια 0 & 7 times; φθορά 45 & 10 times, φθαρτός 4 & 5 times, ἄφθαρτος 13 & 4 times, and ἀφθαρσία 11 & 1 times. Cf. G. Müller, ed., *Lexicon Athanasianum* (Berlin, 1952), col.12, 182, 250-253, 1533-1536.

<sup>235</sup> In *De Incarnatione* and *Orationes contra Arianos*, the Greek word θάνατος emerges respectively 161 & 63 times, ἀποθνήσκω 15 & 10 times, θνητός 16 & 15 times; φανέρωσις 3 & 2 times, φανερός 7 & 23 times, φανερώ 5 & 6 times, φανερώς 2 & 12 times; ἀποκάλυψις 0 & 6 times, and ἀποκαλύπτω 3 & 17 times. Cf. Müller, *Lexicon Athanasianum*, col.128-129, 615-618, 655-656, 1519-1521.

<sup>236</sup> *Or. Ar.* 1.16, 1.35 (PG 26, col.45, 85).

<sup>237</sup> *Or. Ar.* 3.41 (PG 26, col.412). See also *Or. Ar.* 3.7, 3.13, 3.46 (PG 26, col.336, 349, 421).

<sup>238</sup> *De Incarn.* 9 (Thomson, pp.152-154).

<sup>239</sup> *De Incarn.* 8, 20-21 (Thomson, pp.150-152, 184); *Or. Ar.* 1.45 (PG 26, col.104-105).

<sup>240</sup> *De Incarn.* 9 (Thomson, p.154).

N. D. Kelly discerned, that there was a debt which had to be paid before restoration could begin, and thus before other saving acts could function.<sup>241</sup>

Corresponding to the second cause of corruption, Athanasius suggests that two things occurred simultaneously in a miraculous manner in the incarnation and crucifixion of Jesus: the death of all (ὁ πάντων θάνατος) is fulfilled in the Lord's body (τῷ κυριακῷ σώματι), and also death (θάνατος) and corruption (φθορά) are destroyed because of the indwelling Word (διὰ τὸν συνόντα Λόγον), who is immortal by nature.<sup>242</sup> For Athanasius, the cross of the Lord (ὁ κυριακὸς σταυρός) is a sign of victory (τρόπαιον) over death.<sup>243</sup> By abolishing death, the Word brings in life (ζωή) such that all those who believe in Him may have life as well. This incorruptible life was first manifested in His resurrection.<sup>244</sup> Because of the great achievements of the Word, death (θάνατος) is no longer fearful (φοβερός). The Saviour has taken away from believers their terror of bodily death. Such fearless life was demonstrated in the courage of the martyrs.<sup>245</sup> The most relevant motif for this function is the participation of divine nature, which primarily denotes human partaking of the Word in the Spirit.<sup>246</sup> On this point, Athanasius says clearly, 'It is through the Spirit that we are all said to be partakers of God.'<sup>247</sup> Since the indwelling Spirit is divine by nature, Athanasius says that God made men partakers of divine nature (κοινωνοὶ θείας φύσεως).<sup>248</sup> This process of participation of divine nature as A. L. Kolp observes begins in the faith in Christ and culminates in death when one realises one's immortality.<sup>249</sup>

## ii) Revelation of Divine Knowledge

For Athanasius, the most important function of Christ's incarnation is to renew men's knowledge of God. This function is closely linked to the one above. As stated before, for the bishop to exist is to be good. Because God is the ultimate source of goodness, men must cling to Him through divine contemplation. Since divine knowledge is a key factor affecting one's mind to God, and hence his ability to pursue good, it is essential for men's continuous existence. In the fall, all things were in confusion. On the

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<sup>241</sup> Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrine*, p.380.

<sup>242</sup> *De Incarn.* 20 (Thomson, p.184).

<sup>243</sup> *De Incarn.* 30 (Thomson, p.206).

<sup>244</sup> *De Incarn.* 31 (Thomson, p.210).

<sup>245</sup> *De Incarn.* 27-28 (Thomson, pp.198-202); *Or. Ar.* 3.57 (PG 26, col.441-444).

<sup>246</sup> *Ad Serap.* 1.23 (PG 26, col.585).

<sup>247</sup> *Ad Serap.* 1.24 (PG 26, col.585). For Athanasius, when the Spirit is in us, the Son and the Father may be said to be in us as well. Cf. *Ad Serap.* 1.20 (PG 26, col.577).

<sup>248</sup> *Ad Serap.* 1.24 (PG 26, col.585).

<sup>249</sup> A. L. Kolp, 'Partakers of the Divine Nature: The Use of II Peter 1:4 by Athanasius,' *StP* 17 (1982):1022. Although not using the term strictly, Athanasius often calls such participation process 'deification' (θεοποίησις). For Athanasius' use of this term, see Appendix C of this thesis.



one hand, men's image of God was corrupted and they forgot the knowledge of the true God. On the other hand, the deceit of evil spirits was hiding everywhere the knowledge (γνώσιν) of God. In the incarnation, God's very image (εἰκὼν) came down into the earth, renewed men in the image and brought divine knowledge back to the creation.<sup>250</sup> The Son restored both the two affected elements of the added grace in the saving process. Through such restoration, men may actively contemplate God and pursue good again. Although He is invisible (ἀφανής) and indiscernible (ἀόρατος), He made Himself known to be the Son of God (Υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ) and the Word of the Father (Λόγον τοῦ Πατρὸς) through His works (ἔργων).<sup>251</sup> From the works of Jesus, men may regain their ideas of God. Underlying this doctrine is a belief that the Son is the proper offspring of the Father. The thought (ἐννοια) and comprehension (κατάληψις) of the former is the knowledge (γνώσις) concerning the latter.<sup>252</sup> The treasures of all knowledge (οἱ θησαυροὶ τῆς γνώσεως πάσης) are hidden in Him.<sup>253</sup> Having divine knowledge and knowing what is proper to do, men may then correct their past error and walk on a right way again.<sup>254</sup> To the deceit (ἀπάτη) of evil spirits, the Λόγος additionally bestowed on men a special gift of discernment of spirits (διακρίσεις πνευμάτων) so that Christians may have the ability to distinguish them.<sup>255</sup>

A saving model closely related to the renewal of divine knowledge is the reopening of the way up to heaven.<sup>256</sup> Since the incarnate Word had completed His saving work on earth and ascended back to heaven, He opened a way up (ἄνοδος) to paradise. By following the way that Jesus has made accessible, believers may be exalted and ascend into the heaven as well.<sup>257</sup> Humanly speaking, the labour (ὁ κόματος) of such a spiritual journey is great. However, the Saviour has rendered it light (ἐλαφράν) and kindly

<sup>250</sup> *De Incarn.* 13-14 (Thomson, pp.164-168). For a discussion of Christ's re-educating functions in the thought of Athanasius, see K. J. Torjesen, 'The Teaching Function of the Logos: Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, xx-xxxii,' *AHTR*, pp.213-220.

<sup>251</sup> *De Incarn.* 16 (Thomson, p.172).

<sup>252</sup> *Or. Ar.* 1.16 (PG 26, col.45). Athanasius writes explicitly, 'The knowledge of Father through Son (γνώσις Πατρὸς δι' Υἱοῦ) and of Son from Father (Υἱοῦ παρὰ Πατρός) is one and the same.' *Or. Ar.* 2.82 (PG 26, col.320).

<sup>253</sup> *Ad Aeg. Lib.* 16 (PG 25, col.573).

<sup>254</sup> *De Incarn.* 15 (Thomson, p.170).

<sup>255</sup> Athanasius commends, 'This is a great gift (μέγα χάρισμα) which the Word has bestowed upon us, that we should not be deceived by appearances, but that, however these things are concealed, we should all the more distinguish them by the grace (χάρις) of the Spirit.' *Ad Aeg. Lib.* 1 (PG 25, col.540).

<sup>256</sup> Seeing this as a key theme in his soteriology, Athanasius mentions repeatedly that the incarnate Λόγος reopened for men 'the way up to heaven' (τὴν εἰς οὐρανὸν ἄνοδον). Cf. *De Incarn.* 25 (Thomson, pp.194-196). See also *Or. Ar.* 2.70 (PG 26, col.296) and *Ep. Fest.* 45 (PG 26, col.1441).

<sup>257</sup> *De Incarn.* 25 (Thomson, pp.194-196). On this point, Athanasius wrote clearly to his flock, 'He made the world free by the blood of the Saviour (ῥατὰ τοῦ σωτῆρος). Then again, He has caused the grave to be trodden down by the Saviour's death (ῥατὰ τοῦ θανάτου), and furnished a way to the heavenly gates (ῥατὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ) free from obstacles to those who are going up.' *Ep. Fest.* 5.3 (Cureton, p.37). See also *Ep. Fest.* 29, 43 (PG 26, col.1436, 1440).



(χρηστῆν).<sup>258</sup> Concerning this ascendant motif, Athanasius' concept of the air (ἀέρα), the space between the earth and the heaven, is especially noteworthy. For him, the prelapsarian human mind originally could rise up high in the air (ἄνω μετάρσιος), and behold the Word as well as the Father in Him.<sup>259</sup> Nevertheless, after the fall, the devil (διάβολος), having fallen from heaven, roamed around in this lower air (περὶ τὸν ἀέρα τὸν ὧδε κάτω πλανᾶται). Ruling there with his fellow demons (δαιμόνων), the devil attempted to hinder (ἐμποδίζειν) men from rising upwards. However, because of the saving work on the cross, the Lord overthrew the devil (τὸν διάβολον), purified the air (τὸν ἀέρα), and opened for us the way up to heaven (τὴν εἰς οὐρανοὺς ἄνοδον).<sup>260</sup> Because of this decisive victory, believers should no longer fear the devil.<sup>261</sup> Concerning the present situation, D. B. Brakke has a very good summary: The human path from earth to heaven through the air, formerly blocked by Satan, became once again clear and accessible. Demons still roamed the upper atmosphere, but they had been made too weak to prevent diligent Christians from journeying upward.<sup>262</sup>

What is the relationship between these two salvific models? They are actually the same things presented in two different imageries. When talking about the incorporeal nature of the soul, Athanasius suggests that it can live a life outside the body even when bound to that body. When the soul contemplates things above, it traverses foreign lands, meets friends, and converses with the saints and angels.<sup>263</sup> For the bishop, divine contemplation involves temporary ascension of the soul to divine reality. As explained before, the 'mirror' in the soul is inclined. When one moves towards the reflected image, he is at the same time ascending upwards intellectually. The ascendant way to heaven is basically a contemplative journey.<sup>264</sup> With this concept, Athanasius writes that the first man, having his mind fixed on God, lived with the saints in contemplation in the paradise.<sup>265</sup> Putting these two imageries together, one may easily observe that the way opened by Christ is closely linked to His divine revelation. This ascendant journey is primarily reinitiated and made possible by the renewal of our divine knowledge. Through Christ's works on earth, men are given a model of godly way of life. By following this model, they may walk on the way to heaven as well. This way was formerly blocked by the deceit of evil spirit. Manifesting the truth, the incarnate Christ purified the deceitful

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<sup>258</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 28 (PG 26, col.1433).

<sup>259</sup> *C. Gent.* 2 (Thomson, p.6).

<sup>260</sup> *De Incarn.* 25 (Thomson, pp.194-196). See also *Ad Adelph.* 7 (PG 26, col.1081); *Ep. Fest.* 22 (PG 26, col.1432-1433).

<sup>261</sup> As Athanasius says, 'Henceforward we shall no longer fear the serpent, for he was brought to nothing when he was assailed by the Saviour in the flesh.' *Or. Ar.* 2.69 (PG 26, col.293).

<sup>262</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, p.154.

<sup>263</sup> *C. Gent.* 31, 33 (Thomson, p.86, 90).

<sup>264</sup> For further discussion about the nature of the ascendant way to God, see part B.2.a of this chapter.

<sup>265</sup> *C. Gent.* 2 (Thomson, p.6).

air and made the upward contemplative journey easy. Here, it should be noted that as mentioned before paradise (παράδεισος) and heaven (οὐρανός) are precisely speaking different. While the former refers to the present joyful contemplative state, the latter symbolises eternal happiness and coexistence with God. Immortality in heaven is not a necessary result of constant contemplation, but is a graciously promise of God. Real heavenly ascension of soul has its final realisation only on one's death.<sup>266</sup>

## 2. Human Response

As stated before, Athanasius' soteriology rests on two major premises: divine salvation and human response. On this point, G. D. Dragas comments that salvation ultimately rests with God and relatively with man, for God is ultimately free and man is only relatively free. This mutual interaction of absolute and relative divine and human activities is fundamental both to creation and to salvation, but not to the fall, which rests only on man.<sup>267</sup> As seen from the above analysis, nearly all the consequences of the fall are remedied by the incarnate Λόγος. He illuminates men with the knowledge of God through the works of Jesus, which also provides men an archetype of a sinless life so that they may know how to live without sin. To the condemnation of Law, He fulfilled its requirement in the death of His body and ceased its power on men. Besides, the Word also reopened the entrance of the paradise and prepared for men a way up to heaven. Against the attack of the devil, He weakened the demonic power by defeating Satan lethally and bestowed on believers His Spirit and different spiritual gifts so that they may be able to win in the battle. He destroyed death and corruption on the cross and brought in life in His resurrection. All these are ideas Athanasius borrowed from the Scriptures or early Christian tradition. Under the divine salvation, the remaining task believers needed is, as D. B. Brakke concluded, 'To ascend to heaven by means of the way up that Christ had made accessible.'<sup>268</sup> In short, Christians should try their best to keep themselves walking on the contemplative way to God.

### a) Fundamental Concepts about the Way to God

The conception of human life or spiritual growth as a way or a journey has a very long history. In her recent study on ancient ethics, J. Annas has given a very good analysis about how this idea was developed in Greek philosophies. In general, ancient ethical reflection takes its starting point from reflections on one's life as a whole, begins

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<sup>266</sup> A typical example of such ascension of soul may be found in the story of Amun. Cf. *V. Ant.* 60 (SC 400, pp.294-298).

<sup>267</sup> Dragas, 'A Note concerning Athanasius' Soteriology,' p.147. See also Dragas, 'Nature and Grace according to Saint Athanasius,' p.142.

<sup>268</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, p.152.

by realising that one has a final end, and seeks to make this more precise. Although there exists certain degree of diversity, philosophers believe that happiness, which may be identified with living well and doing well, is the final good. Being an unspecific notion, happiness is subject to considerable revision as the philosophical account progresses. For this reason, our final end is not a 'fixed' goal, but is determined in and by developing the virtues.<sup>269</sup> Ancient moral life is always in a process of development. Everything we do reflects the way we have acted and affects the way we will act.<sup>270</sup>

Strictly speaking, the fathers' concepts of the spiritual journey to God originated from the Scriptures. Here, it is variously called 'the way of salvation' (ὁδὸν σωτηρίας), 'the way of the Lord' (τὴν ὁδὸν τοῦ Κυρίου), 'the straight way' (τὴν εὐθείαν ὁδὸν), and 'the way of righteousness' (τὴν ὁδὸν τῆς δικαιοσύνης).<sup>271</sup> Different from that of Greek philosophies, the Christian version of spiritual journey has a well-defined 'goal' specified by the Scriptures. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches that the way that leads to life is narrow (τεθλιμμένη).<sup>272</sup> Also, He tells the disciples in a farewell discourse that He is actually the Way (ἡ ὁδός).<sup>273</sup> In his epistles, Paul frequently uses racing to symbolise the Christian effort to God. Quoting himself as an example, he urges people to forget what is behind, strain towards what is ahead, and press on towards the goal in order to win the heavenly prize.<sup>274</sup> Following this motif, he says in a testamentary letter that he had finished the race (τὸν δρόμον) and there would be in store for him a crown of righteousness.<sup>275</sup> In the book of Hebrews, the writer also asks the recipients to 'leave the elementary teachings about Christ (τὸν τῆς ἀρχῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ λόγον) and go on towards perfection (τὴν τελειότητα).'<sup>276</sup>

In the early Christian Church, the concept of spiritual advancement was further developed. In the so-called second letter of Clement, the author prods the audience to strive to advance in the commandments of the Lord (πειρώμεθα προκόπτειν ἐν ταῖς ἐντολαῖς τοῦ κυρίου).<sup>277</sup> Irenaeus teaches that if men do truly progress by faith towards better things (*per fidem profecerint in melius*), receive the Spirit of God, and bring forth fruit thereof, they shall be spiritual (*erunt spirituales*), as being planted in the paradise of

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<sup>269</sup> Here, it should be noted that virtue is for the ancients not merely a disposition to act in certain ways, but is a state of the agent's character and emotions. Having a virtue is having one's character developed in such a way that one not only grasps what the right thing to do is but takes pleasure in doing it. It has both intellectual and reactive sides. Cf. J. Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford, 1995), pp.53-66.

<sup>270</sup> Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, chap.2, 21.

<sup>271</sup> Acts 16:17, 18:25; 2 Pt. 2:15, 2:21.

<sup>272</sup> Mt. 7:14.

<sup>273</sup> Jn. 14:6.

<sup>274</sup> Phil. 3:13-14. See also 1 Cor. 9:24.

<sup>275</sup> 2 Tim. 4:7-8.

<sup>276</sup> Heb. 6:1.

<sup>277</sup> *Clementis Epistula II* 17.3 (Lightfoot & Harmer, p.124).

God (*paradiso Dei*).<sup>278</sup> Quoting some teachings of Paul, Cyprian testifies that the faith (*fides*) of Christians may advance (*proficiat*) and grow (*crescat*).<sup>279</sup> In a treatise on chastity, Methodius portrays the spiritual life of a virgin. Those who are still imperfect (*ἀτελείς*) and beginning their lessons are first shaped (*μορφοῦνται*) by those who are more perfect (*τῶν τελειοτέρων*) until they are brought forth and regenerated unto the greatness and beauty of virtue (*μέγεθος καὶ κάλλος ἀρετῆς*). Having made progress (*προκοπήν*), they in turn assist in labouring and bringing up other spiritual children.<sup>280</sup>

This concept of spiritual journey, which symbolises one's spiritual growth, gained its greatest development in the Alexandrian church. For Clement, the spiritual journey of a Christian involves many mystic stages of advancement (*τὰς προκοπὰς τὰς μυστικάς*). It is a process in which man rises from heathenism (*ἔθνος*), through faith (*πίστις*) and knowledge (*γνώσις*), to love (*ἀγάπη*).<sup>281</sup> He explains that the life of a Gnostic (*γνωστικός*) began with admiration of the creation (*ἐκ τοῦ θαυμάζειν τὴν κτίσιν*). Directly on hearing of God, he believed (*ἐπίστευσεν*) in consequence of the admiration he entertained. Through the power of impulse thence derived, he devotes his energies in every way to acquire the knowledge (*γνώσιν*) of what he desires. This desire blended with inquiry arises as faith advances. Apprehending essences (*οὐσίας*) and things (*πράγματα*) through the words (*διὰ τῶν λόγων*), he brings his soul to what is essential. Training himself in scientific contemplation (*τῇ ἐπιστημονικῇ θεωρίᾳ*), he proceeds to exercise himself in larger generalisations and grander propositions (*τοῖς καθολικώτερον καὶ μεγαλοπρεπέρον εἰρημένους*). Through the perfection of habit (*διὰ τὸ τέλος τῆς ἕξεως*) he acquired in purity from great discipline (*συνασκήσεως πολλῆς*), he may be changed by love (*ἀγάπη*) from a good and faithful servant (*ἐκ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ καὶ πιστοῦ δούλου*) into a friend (*εἰς φίλον*).<sup>282</sup> Striving to attain to the summit of knowledge, he will gradually become a passionless and fearless man contemning all the pains and pleasures of the world. Knowing both present and future good things (*τὰ ὄντα ἀγαθὰ καὶ τὰ ἐσόμενα*) and also the things that are in reality not to be dreaded, he will pursue absorbedly to receive the hopes of the future and struggle against fears boldly. From the love to God (*τὴν πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν ἀγάπην*), he willingly obeys any call (*κλήσις*) including martyrdom, with no other aim in view than pleasing God. Being a perfect man and friend of God (*τέλειος ἀνὴρ καὶ φίλος τοῦ Θεοῦ*), he may then be placed in the rank of son (*ἐν υἱοῦ τάξει*) and behold

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<sup>278</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 5.10.1 (PG 7, col.1147).

<sup>279</sup> Cyprian, *Ad Fortunatum (De Exhortatione Martyrii)* 8 (CSEL 3.1, pp.329).

<sup>280</sup> Methodius, *Convivium Decem Virginum* 3.8 (SC 95, p.110).

<sup>281</sup> Clement, *Stromata* 7.10.57 (GCS 17, pp.41-42).

<sup>282</sup> Clement, *Stromata* 7.11.60-62 (GCS 17, pp.43-45).



God ‘face to face’ (πρόσωπον πρὸς πρόσωπον), which is the crowning step of advancement a Gnostic soul receives.<sup>283</sup>

The above Clement’s thought was developed more fully by Origen. Following the biblical teachings, he emphasises that man is created according to the image (εἰκὼν) of God. Man is defined, at the deepest level of his being, by his relation to God and by the movement that leads to his becoming more like his model. So, the ‘after-the-image’ (κατ’ εἰκόνα) is actually ‘our principal substance’ (ἡμῶν ἡ προηγούμενη ὑπόστασις).<sup>284</sup> It is a dynamic reality and tends to rejoin its model and to assimilate itself to it. It is a kind of seed that must grow. The goal of this growth, which will only attain perfection in the final beatitude, is the ‘likeness’ (ὁμοίωσις).<sup>285</sup> The way to God is indeed a spiritual progress in which man advances from the ‘image’ to the ‘likeness.’ The key for such advancement is ‘the imitation of God’ (*Dei imitatione*), which denotes a life in conformity with what God is and what God wills.<sup>286</sup> A crucial factor for such imitation is to acquire the true knowledge (γνῶσις), which is the contemplation (θεωρία) of the Mystery. This knowledge is for Origen a vision or a direct contact, which embraces participation and union in the divine being, and love. It is this knowledge that assimilates man to God.<sup>287</sup> Here, one should note that knowledge is for Origen a result of both divine grace and human effort. On the one hand, since God is invisible, the divine being is only known if He freely makes Himself known. Divine knowledge is always bestowed by grace (χάριτι).<sup>288</sup> On the other hand, man must prepare himself to receive the grace. He should read and meditate the Scriptures in an attitude of prayer, and at the same time remove through life-long ascetic practice all the obstacles that hinder the reception of the divine light, including one’s attachment to the body and sin. For Origen, the virtue that most closely linked with knowledge, or contemplation, is purity of mind (καθαρότης νοῦ).<sup>289</sup>

Origen believes that, through the victory of Christ, Christians may ‘consecrate themselves to God, and earnestly devote themselves day by day to advancement in a life of piety (τῇ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν αὐτοῖς καθαρωτέρα ὁσημέραι εἰς αὐτὸν εὐσεβείᾳ).’<sup>290</sup> He further explains that, by participation in Christ, man may make progress and advance to higher degrees of perfection (*proficit et in altiores profectuum gradus venit*). By partaking of the Holy Spirit, man is made purer and holier (*purior ac sincerior*). Earning

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<sup>283</sup> Clement, *Stromata* 7.11.63-68 (GCS 17, pp.45-49).

<sup>284</sup> Origen, *Commentarii in Ioannem* 20.22.182 (GCS 10, p.355).

<sup>285</sup> Cf. Crouzel, *Origen*, pp.92-98.

<sup>286</sup> Origen, *De Principiis* 3.6.1 (GCS 22, p.280).

<sup>287</sup> Cf. Crouzel, *Origen*, pp.116-118.

<sup>288</sup> Origen, *Homiliae in Lucam* 3 (GCS 35, p.19).

<sup>289</sup> Origen, *Commentarii in Ioannem* 32.27.338 (GCS 10, p.472).

<sup>290</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum* 7.17 (GCS 2, p.169).



advancement to this grade, man may obtain the grace of wisdom and knowledge (*sapientiae ac scientiae gratiam*) when he is made worthy. He may make so great an advance in holiness and purity (*sinceritatis ac puritatis*) that his nature may become worthy of God. In this way, he will receive from Him power always to exist and to abide forever. By the renewal of the ceaseless working of the Triune God, in various stages of progress (*singulos quosque profectuum gradus*), man may be able at some future time to behold the holy and the blessed life (*sanctam et beatam vitam*).<sup>291</sup> However, it must be noted that Origen applies the terms spiritual (πνευματικός) and perfect (τέλειος) only in a very relative way to men living on earth and these ideals will only be completely achieved in the beatitude.<sup>292</sup>

Origen's concept of spiritual advancement is demonstrated most clearly in a homily on Numbers. Here, he uses the forty-two stages the children of Israel had passed on the way to the promised land to symbolise two related spiritual journeys: the progression of the soul in virtues through the divine law and the ascension of the mind from earth to heaven through divine enlightenment.<sup>293</sup> For Origen, the first starting place *Ramesse* represents earthly agitation. The soul starts out from it and is converted from the errors of life (*erroribus vitae*) to the way of virtue and knowledge (*viam virtutis et agnitionis*). Then in *Sochoth*, the soul prepares itself for the initial struggle against the opposing powers in *Buthan*. Reaching *Iroth*, it begins to practise a moderate self-control and look for the future hope. Having passed the hardships of temptations in *amaritudine*, it may get a little refreshment in *Helim*. After camping by the *Rubrum*, the soul will come to *desertus Sin* where it learns to distinguish between visions. Beginning to have the discernment of heavenly visions, it will gradually arrive at health (*sanitatem*) in *Raphaca*. Having accepted toils with delight in *Halus*, the soul may then become worthy of praise in *Raphidin*. Being capable of receiving divine mysteries and heavenly visions, it will be given the law (*lex*) by God in the *desertus Sina*. In the *monumenta concupiscentiae*, lusts are buried and covered over. Having handed over the lusts to death, the soul will be blessed in *Aseroth*. In *Rathma* it is trained to have completed visions and gain perfect understanding of things, whereas in *Remonphares* it is taught to separate great and heavenly things from earthly and lowly things. After it is whitewashed in *Lebna*, praiseworthy temptation (*laudabilis tentatio*) will be brought to it in *Ressa* as a kind of protection and defence. On reaching *Macelath*, the soul has progressed so far as to rule over the body as well as the whole world. Having armed with so many virtues, it may then go forth to the war it has against the principalities in *mons Sephar*. Next, the soul will be made competent in *Chardath*, and contemplates the beginning of things in

<sup>291</sup> Origen, *De Principiis* 1.3.8 (GCS 22, pp.61-62).

<sup>292</sup> Cf. Crouzel, *Origen*, pp.99-118.

<sup>293</sup> Origen, *Homiliae in Numeros* 27.6 (PG 12, col.787).

*Maceloth*. It has to endure many things patiently in *Caath*, and will be struck with amazement by the knowledge of marvellous things in *Thara*. In *Matheca* new death will be experienced and in *Asenna* the strength of endurance will be revealed. Then the wicked suggestions of the adversary are shut out in *Mesorothe*, and the divine words are filtered and drunk in *Banaim*. Since temptations are needed for the completion of virtues, dense stages in temptation are found in *Galgad*. After the trials, the soul will come to good things in *Tabatha*, pass through them to better things in *Ebrona*, and arrive at the purposes of a man in *Gasiongaber*. Having been further purified in *Sin* and surpassing the holy fruitfulness in *Pharancades*, the soul may then dwell on the mount of God in *mons Or* and be shaded from all the heat of temptations by Him in *Selmona*. After making different types of progresses in *Phinon*, *Oboth* and *Gai*, and passing through the beehive of temptations (*apiarium tentationum*) in *Dibongad*, it will come to *Gelmon Deblathaim* where earthly things are completely scorned and despised. Having passed and separated entirely from the world in *Abarim*, the soul will at last reach the east of *Moab* where it prepares itself to enter the promised land.<sup>294</sup>

Here, it should be noted that, according to the description above, there is no clear separation between moral and intellectual themes for the eastern fathers. Knowledge and virtue are frequently mingled together. Both Clement and Origen seem to have taken this for granted. Although Origen says explicitly that there are two journeys for the soul, the progression in virtues and the ascension through enlightenment, he frequently jumps between them in his later exposition as if they are overlapped.<sup>295</sup> Precisely speaking, these two journeys are not totally the same, but are coherent. When one advances, the other advances as well. One cannot simultaneously promote in one and degrade in the other. The acquisition of divine knowledge will naturally cause one to pursue more virtue, and the improvement in virtue will in turn increase one's ability to receive heavenly visions. The two spiritual journeys are parallel and closely interconnected.

Although Athanasius has systematically modified Origen's theology to suit the Nicene faith, he seems to be still unable to escape from his contemporary mentality. Following his Alexandrian predecessors, he conceives the effort to God as a spiritual journey. Athanasius does not have a definite term for this spiritual 'way' (ὁδός). He calls it diversely in different passages. Its names include, for example, 'the way of truth' (ἡ τῆς ἀληθείας ὁδός),<sup>296</sup> 'the way of virtue' (ἡ τῆς ἀρετῆς ὁδός),<sup>297</sup> 'the way to God' (ἡ πρὸς

<sup>294</sup> Origen, *Homiliae in Numeros* 27.9-12 (PG 12, col.790-800).

<sup>295</sup> At the beginning of the homily, it is written that the progression in virtues is a journey when the soul is placed in flesh, whereas the ascension through enlightenment is a journey after resurrection. Cf. Origen, *Homiliae in Numeros* 27.6 (PG 12, col.787). Apparently, they are sequential and separate. However, Origen has never followed this claim in his later discussion. It is probable that this is a corrupted reading made by the Latin translator.

<sup>296</sup> E.g. *C. Gent.* 29, 30, 47 (Thomson, p.80, 82, 132); *Or. Ar.* 3.28 (PG 26, col.385).

τὸν Θεὸν ὁδός),<sup>298</sup> ‘the way into a kingdom’ (ἡ εἰς βασιλείαν ὁδός),<sup>299</sup> ‘the way into the paradise’ (ἡ εἰς τὸν παράδεισον ὁδός),<sup>300</sup> and ‘the way up to heavens’ (ἡ εἰς οὐρανούς ἄνοδος).<sup>301</sup> Although these terms have different emphases, they all point to the same religious journey. In the extant writings of Athanasius preserved in Greek, the word ὁδός appears 102 times, over half of which are used metaphorically to denote the spiritual way to God.<sup>302</sup>

Since Athanasius has forsaken the hierarchical cosmology, he cannot accept in full all the spiritual teachings of Clement and Origen. On this point, he appears to have put himself in a difficult situation. If there are no more intermediate stages between Creator and creation, how can one journey to God? The most important key here is human will. As mentioned before, transformation of human nature is for Athanasius primarily a future promise after one’s death. For men living on earth, what is changeable is not their nature, but their will. By contemplating the divine image reflected by the soul, one may intellectually approach God and ascend to heavenly reality. Having travelled by will firmly in this way, and hence having maintained good throughout the earthly life, he may receive heavenly immortality as a reward of lifelong effort. Obviously, the Athanasian spiritual journey is strictly speaking not geographical, but intellectual in nature. It is a continuous journey within one’s soul aiming at approaching God, as well as pursuing good. When the bishop writes that the soul is a mobile being, which moves incessantly, he is talking about internal thinking of the soul.<sup>303</sup> When a man is sleeping, he beholds what is outside himself, travels to other countries, and meets his acquaintances. All these are indeed ‘inward movement’ (κινεῖται ἑνδον).<sup>304</sup> Being like a mirror, the soul moves with its own divine knowledge towards the reflected image in itself. For this reason, several times Athanasius says explicitly that the soul is itself the way. Invariably he refers this nature to its remaining thoughts and ideas about God.<sup>305</sup> It is external deceits that blocked the way and made it move in a wrong direction. So, when the incarnate Christ reveals divine knowledge to men and removes all deceits, He may be said to have reopened for us a way up to heaven at the same time.

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<sup>297</sup> E.g. *V. Ant.* 3, 7, 20, 26, 93 (SC 400, p.136, 154, 186, 208, 376); *C. Gent.* 47 (Thomson, p.132).

<sup>298</sup> E.g. *C. Gent.* 5, 30 (Thomson, p.14, 82).

<sup>299</sup> E.g. *De Sent. Dion.* 10 (PG 25, col.496).

<sup>300</sup> E.g. *Or. Ar.* 2.66 (PG 26, col.288).

<sup>301</sup> E.g. *De Incarn.* 25 (Thomson, p.196); *Ad Adolph.* 7 (PG 26, col.1081).

<sup>302</sup> Müller, *Lexicon Athanasianum*, col.965.

<sup>303</sup> *C. Gent.* 4 (Thomson, p.10).

<sup>304</sup> *C. Gent.* 31 (Thomson, p.86).

<sup>305</sup> For example, Athanasius writes, ‘For the thoughts and ideas about immortality never leave the soul but remain in it...So, therefore, the soul has an idea of the contemplation about God, and is its own way (ὁδός), taking the knowledge and understanding of God the Word not from outside but from itself.’ *C. Gent.* 33 (Thomson, p.92). See also *C. Gent.* 30 (Thomson, p.82).

Here, it should be noted that Athanasius' spiritual journey is not purely intellectual, but involves also proper physical responses. Following his predecessors, Athanasius treats moral and intellectual advancements as a single enterprise. The ascension of the soul to God and the progression in virtues are synchronous. In certain extent, he may be said to have tied them even more closely together. Since the soul is for him in full control of its bodily members, the movement of the former naturally determines that of the latter. When the soul inclines to the good or the evil, the body pursues reality or unreality accordingly. Just like the charioteer and his two horses, they always move together.<sup>306</sup> It is under this understanding that Athanasius switches freely between these two themes and uses their vocabulary without encumbrance.<sup>307</sup> Although primarily the term ἡ τῆς ἀληθείας ὁδός denotes the true intellectual way and ἡ τῆς ἀρετῆς ὁδός implies the disciplinary journey to a virtuous life, they both refer to the same thing, the way to God, in his writings.<sup>308</sup>

Although Athanasius has forsaken the Origenist conception about continuous transformation of human nature and has constrained spiritual advancement on the changeable human will, there are still difficulties in his teachings on the spiritual journey. If the soul is like a mirror reflecting everything about God, what is advancing in the spiritual journey towards the reflected image? In his writings, Athanasius encourages people repeatedly to keep walking on the spiritual way so that they may receive the heavenly reward from God. However, except for some hints concealed in his pastoral and spiritual writings, especially the *Vita Antonii*, he has not explained clearly what is advancing in his extensive theologico-apologetic writings.<sup>309</sup> Compared with that of Origen, Athanasius' spiritual journey is much less concrete and less well defined. While keeping the prevalent Alexandrian concept of spiritual advancement, he rejects the hierarchical cosmology. As a result of putting two primarily incompatible thoughts together, the original Origenist system is de-systematised. Apart from the word 'way' (ὁδός), Athanasius seldom uses other vocabularies, such as pilgrimage or sojourn, to describe the journey. Although he sometimes seems to have portrayed it as a journey, it is precisely speaking an internal disposition of the mind. What is important is not how far the soul has travelled, but which direction, good or evil, it is travelling. The progress is

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<sup>306</sup> *C. Gent.* 5 (Thomson, pp.12-14).

<sup>307</sup> For example, he parallels the abandonment of the contemplation of intelligible reality and misuse of individual faculties of the body. Immediately after pointing out the soul's turning away from the good, he writes, 'It moves no longer according to virtue (κατὰ ἀρετήν).' *C. Gent.* 4 (Thomson, p.10).

<sup>308</sup> E.g. *C. Gent.* 47 (Thomson, p.132). In this passage, Athanasius uses the terms the path of virtue (τὴν τῆς ἀρετῆς ἀτραπὸν) and the way of truth (τὴν τῆς ἀληθείας ὁδόν) simultaneously.

<sup>309</sup> Truly, when discussing the explanation of Luke 2:52, Athanasius has mentioned the advancement of wisdom, stature, and grace. Cf. *Or. Ar.* 3.51-53 (PG 26, col.429-436). However, they are all extracted from the controversial biblical verse. Apart from that discussion, he nowhere emphasises the advancement of such qualities.



not measured in terms of time or distance, but in terms of desire (πόθω) and purposefulness (προαιρέσει).<sup>310</sup>

The above concept of spiritual journey may be seen clearly in his *Contra Gentes*. Roughly speaking, its content may be divided into two main sections. The first section evaluates and refutes paganism.<sup>311</sup> At the beginning, Athanasius argues that paganism is idolatry straying from the way (πλανηθέντες τῆς ὁδοῦ).<sup>312</sup> After a long discussion condemning the mistakes of paganism, Athanasius concludes at the end of the first section, ‘So since the idolatry of the Greeks has thus been refuted...let us now follow the way of truth (τὴν τῆς ἀληθείας ὁδὸν ὁδεύσωμεν), as we announced at the beginning of our discourse.’<sup>313</sup> He urges the readers to contemplate the ruler and creator of the universe (θεωρήσωμεν τὸν ἡγεμόνα καὶ δημιουργὸν τοῦ παντός), the Word of the Father, so that the Greeks may know how far they have cut themselves off from the truth.<sup>314</sup> In the second section, Athanasius begins with a summary, ‘The ideas discussed above have been shown to be nothing other than error in men’s lives, but the way of truth (ἡ τῆς ἀληθείας ὁδός) will bring us to the really existent God.’<sup>315</sup> He then explains that the way to God is not far from us, but it is within us and we ourselves can find its beginning. He writes explicitly on this point, ‘And if anyone were to ask what this way might be, I mean that it is each one’s soul (τὴν ἐκάστου ψυχὴν) and the mind within it (τὸν ἐν αὐτῇ νοῦν). Only through this can God be seen and apprehended.’<sup>316</sup> In order that no one may make excuses by saying that he knows no such way, he discusses at length in this section the self-revelation of God.<sup>317</sup> Men may contemplate Him through the divine knowledge remaining in the soul, through the order and harmony in the created cosmos, or through the Scriptures. God did not hide Himself away from human beings, but reveals Himself to all every day. Men’s own responsibility for their disobedience is undeniable.<sup>318</sup> Athanasius warns at the end of the treatise, ‘For as those who live in obedience to him have eternal life as reward, so those who travel the opposite way (τὴν ἐναντίαν) and not the path of virtue (τὴν τῆς ἀρετῆς ἀτραπὸν) will incur great shame (αἰσχύνῃ μεγάλῃ) and merciless danger (κίνδυνος ἀσύγγνωστος) on the day of judgement (ἡμέρᾳ κρίσεως),

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<sup>310</sup> *V. Ant.* 7 (SC 400, p.154).

<sup>311</sup> *C. Gent.* 1-29 (Thomson, pp.2-82).

<sup>312</sup> *C. Gent.* 6 (Thomson, p.14).

<sup>313</sup> *C. Gent.* 29 (Thomson, p.80).

<sup>314</sup> *C. Gent.* 29 (Thomson, pp.80-82).

<sup>315</sup> *C. Gent.* 30 (Thomson, p.82).

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>317</sup> As Athanasius says, ‘So let the Greeks who worship idols not make excuses, nor anyone else deceive himself that he knows no such road and therefore finds a pretext for his godlessness.’ *C. Gent.* 30 (Thomson, p.82).

<sup>318</sup> *C. Gent.* 30-47 (Thomson, pp.82-132).



because although they knew the way of truth (τὴν τῆς ἀληθείας ὁδόν) they did the opposite to what they knew.<sup>319</sup>

## b) Human Effort for the Way to God

Athanasius conceives the human effort to God as a combination of many elements. From his doctrine of creation, we know that the most crucial factor affecting the disposition and hence the progression of the soul is divine contemplation. However, such contemplation is not purely intellectual, but must be accompanied by a pure soul and virtuous life. Athanasius says on this point, 'But in addition to the study and true knowledge of the Scriptures are needed a good life and pure soul and virtue according to Christ, so that the mind, journeying (ὁδεύσας) in this path, may be able to obtain and apprehend what it desires.'<sup>320</sup> From his extensive works, a clear formula for human response to the divine grace similar to that of his predecessor may be discerned. That is *the contemplation of God with a pure soul through virtuous life*.<sup>321</sup> Only through this method may one maintain good and hence complete the way to God successfully. Following Clement and Origen, Athanasius treats divine contemplation as the supreme task a believer must do. It is the key act determining the destiny of a man.

### i) Contemplation of God (θεωρία Θεοῦ)

In Athanasius' writings, words of the same root as θεωρία appear 154 times in total, most of which are in the verbal form θεωρέω.<sup>322</sup> This figure of course does not include those works not preserved in Greek, such as the *Epistulae ad Virgines*. The patristic use of the word 'contemplation' is different from modern religious writers, who distinguished it from 'meditation' strictly.<sup>323</sup> According to G. W. H. Lampe's categorisation, the word θεωρέω has four different meanings in the patristic writings. They are to *contemplate mystically* through the agency of the Holy Spirit, to *understand the hidden sense* of the Scriptures, to *see* in the sense of receive and give audience to, and to *perceive* a smell. Amongst them, the first two were much more commonly used, especially in the

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<sup>319</sup> C. Gent. 47 (Thomson, p.132).

<sup>320</sup> De Incarn. 57 (Thomson, p.274).

<sup>321</sup> Although no scholar has proposed this formula in exact wording so far, similar idea may be found everywhere. For example, V. Twomey when discussing the scriptural interpretation of Athanasius writes, 'To know and speak of God one has to be pure in mind. Living union with God in Christ through the Holy Spirit is the source of all true interpretation.' V. Twomey, 'St. Athanasius: De Synodis,' *Scriptural Interpretation in the Fathers: Letter and Spirit*, ed. T. Finan and V. Twomey (Cambridge, 1995), p.116. Knowledge of God, pure mind and godly life are integrated together.

<sup>322</sup> The Greek word θεωρέω appears 132 times, θεωρία 19 times, θεωρός 2 times, and θεωρήμα 1 time. Cf. Müller, *Lexicon Athanasianum*, col.652-654.

<sup>323</sup> For modern religious writers, contemplation is a kind of non-discursive mental prayer aiming at deepening one's love and faith to God, whereas meditation is a kind of discursive reflection with the purpose of obtaining fuller understanding of the truth or personal experience. Cf. J. N. Ward, 'Contemplation,' *DCS*, pp.95-96.

Alexandrian church.<sup>324</sup> While Clement used the word mostly in relation to mystical contemplation, Origen applied it largely in connection with allegorical interpretation.<sup>325</sup> Following his Alexandrian predecessors, Athanasius employed the word largely in these two related senses. Such contemplation involves inward and upward intellectual movement of the soul. It includes active thinking of divine reality through the knowledge remaining in the soul, the order of the universe and the Scriptures, and passive waiting for heavenly visions, both when one is bodily awake and sleeping.<sup>326</sup> In these visions, one may behold what is outside himself, travel other countries, meet his acquaintances or divine beings, and even forecast his actions of the day.<sup>327</sup>

First of all, the meaning of some important terms must be clarified. The first one is 'knowledge.' Undeniably, the terms contemplation (θεωρία) and knowledge (γνώσις) are closely linked together in the early church. As Athanasius says, through divine contemplation, the soul takes the knowledge (γνώσιν) and understanding (κατάληψιν) of God the Word.<sup>328</sup> Precisely speaking, θεωρία and γνώσις are not synonymous. While the former is a human action, the latter is essentially a state of knowing. Divine knowledge is a key element constituting the spiritual way to God. So, only with a certain level of divine knowledge can man contemplate God correctly. However, when the soul contemplates God, it will advance on the way and will gain more knowledge in the process. This additional knowledge can in turn be used to improve the clarity of subsequent contemplation, and hence bring forth more knowledge. On this base, Athanasius writes that when men gained some notion about the Father through the Word, they might live a happy and truly blessed life (τὸν εὐδαίμονα καὶ μακάριον ὄντως βίον).<sup>329</sup> On the contrary, when men were deprived of the conception of God (τῆς περὶ Θεοῦ ἐννοίας) in the fall, they lost their eternal existence (τοῦ εἶναι αἰεὶ) as well.<sup>330</sup> Here, it should be noted that the roles of contemplation and knowledge are not interchangeable. While the acquisition of knowledge is an assured result of continuous divine contemplation, it cannot guarantee further spiritual advancement. Human free will is an important factor affecting the process. One who knows the way of truth can still choose

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<sup>324</sup> 'θεωπέω,' *PGL*, p.647.

<sup>325</sup> E.g. Clement, *Stromata* 6.18.166 (GCS 15, p.517); Origen, *Commentarii in Matthaeum* 35 (GCS 38, pp.65-68).

<sup>326</sup> For Athanasius, contemplation in dream is not much different from that when one is awake. In his *De Mor. Val.*, he urges the readers not to pursue vigil of the body, but that of the soul only. When the body is sleeping, the mind can travel through outer places and behold heavenly visions. No matter whether the body is awake or is sleeping, the soul can still contemplate spiritual reality. Cf. *De Mor. Val.* 6 (OCA 117, p.7). Since the body has become inactive and cannot transmit worldly attraction to the soul in sleep, the soul theoretically can even contemplate more absorbedly in this state.

<sup>327</sup> *C. Gent.* 31 (Thomson, p.86).

<sup>328</sup> *C. Gent.* 33 (Thomson, p.92).

<sup>329</sup> *De Incarn.* 11 (Thomson, p.160).

<sup>330</sup> *De Incarn.* 4 (Thomson, p.144).

to travel the opposite way, both intellectually and morally. For this reason, the bishop urges his followers zealously to live in obedience.<sup>331</sup>

A quality closely related to knowledge is 'wisdom.' In the early church, the terms 'wisdom' (σοφία) and 'knowledge' (γνώσις) are often bonded together. However, again, they are not synonymous. Clement even says plainly that knowledge differs from wisdom. A thing that is knowledge is certainly wisdom, but the reverse is not necessarily true.<sup>332</sup> When explaining how Christ can become a beginning of many others, Athanasius declares that when the Son is considered as Wisdom, the wisdom that is implanted in men is an image (εἰκὼν). In this wisdom men, having the power of knowledge (τὸ εἰδέναι) and the understanding (τὸ φρονεῖν), become recipients (δεκτικοὶ) of the all-framing Wisdom (τῆς δημιουργοῦ Σοφίας) and through Him (δι' αὐτῆς) they are able to know (γινώσκειν) His Father (τὸν αὐτῆς Πατέρα).<sup>333</sup> Based on this concept, the bishop writes that the Son may be said to be 'a beginning of ways' (ἀρχὴν ὁδῶν) because such wisdom becomes a sort of beginning (ἀρχή τις) and rudiments of the knowledge of God (στοιχείωσις τῆς ἐπὶ Θεὸν γνώσεως). Entering upon this way first (ταύτη πρώτη ἐπιβάς τις τῇ ὁδῷ), keeping it in the fear of God (ταύτην φυλάττων τῷ φόβῳ τοῦ Θεοῦ), then advancing upwards in the thoughts (εἰτα ἐπαναβαίνων τῇ διανοίᾳ) and perceiving the framing Wisdom that is in the creation (νοήσας τὴν ἐν τῇ κτίσει δημιουργὸν Σοφίαν), man will perceive in Him also His Father (νοήσει ἐν αὐτῇ καὶ τὸν αὐτῆς Πατέρα).<sup>334</sup> Although belonging to created order, human wisdom is for Athanasius a prerequisite element for the spiritual journey of a Christian. Signifying the ability to apprehend spiritual reality, it is as mentioned before an important element in the added grace on top of divine image and basic divine knowledge. The advancement of wisdom can cause one to contemplate God and understand His knowledge better. It is needed not just at the beginning, but throughout the way to God.

From our previous discussion, we know that contemplation (θεωρία) is very crucial for the destiny of a man. It determines the direction in which the soul moves. In short, contemplating is moving forwards. It is because men turned their minds away from God, the source of goodness, that they lapsed and became mortal. In order to avoid corruption, they must maintain good by contemplating God.<sup>335</sup> Since the soul is in restless motion, it moves spontaneously to the direction it inclines. When it contemplates the body, it descends towards unreality. In contrast, when it contemplates God, it ascends towards divine reality and learns to be good. The longer it inclines, the farther it advances in that

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<sup>331</sup> *C. Gent.* 47 (Thomson, p.132).

<sup>332</sup> Clement, *Stromata* 7.10.55 (GCS 17, p.40).

<sup>333</sup> *Or. Ar.* 2.78 (PG 26, col.312).

<sup>334</sup> *Or. Ar.* 2.80 (PG 26, col.316).

<sup>335</sup> *De Incarn.* 4 (Thomson, p.144).

direction.<sup>336</sup> As M. A. McIntosh remarks, mystical contemplation in the earlier eras referred to the most intimate and transforming encounter with God. It is a term that holds together two elements that people often see contrasted as though they are mutually exclusive, namely the affective or loving impulse and the intellectual or knowing impulse.<sup>337</sup> For Athanasius, as well as many other church fathers, the result of contemplation is not just intellectual enlightenment, but also advancement in the love of God and hence motivation in the imitation of Christ. Contemplation is not just synchronous with the progression in virtues, but also embraces it. Because of this, absorbed contemplation of God is the most important key for keeping one progressing on the right way. For those who have gone astray, such as the Greeks, divine contemplation can also tell them how far they have separated themselves from the truth.<sup>338</sup>

Absorbed contemplative life is now made achievable and easy by the incarnate Λόγος, who renews the divine image and reveals the divine knowledge fully and unambiguously to the creation through His life on earth.<sup>339</sup> On this point, Athanasius writes repeatedly, ‘we may contemplate the Son in the Father (θεωρεῖσθαι τὸν Υἱὸν ἐν τῷ Πατρὶ) and the Father in the Son (τὸν Πατέρα ἐν τῷ Υἱῷ).’<sup>340</sup> Men’s task here is to turn their minds back to God and contemplate Him undistractedly. For this reason, he urged people everywhere to practise divine contemplation.<sup>341</sup> Here, it is worth noting that the object of contemplation is for him not limited to God Himself, but involves all heavenly things. In the beginning, Adam lived with the saints in the contemplation of intelligible reality (ἐν τῇ τῶν νοητῶν θεωρίᾳ).<sup>342</sup> When one is sleeping, his soul may contemplate what is in the heavens (τὰ ἐν οὐρανοῖς), often meeting saints (ἁγίοις) and angels (ἁγγέλοις).<sup>343</sup> Although the ultimate end remains the Triune God, there exist many intermediate objects that believers can contemplate and hence imitate.

As stated before, men for Athanasius may contemplate God, and thus acquire divine knowledge, through the divine concept remaining in the rational soul (λογικὴ ψυχὴ) and the created universe (γενόμενος κόσμος).<sup>344</sup> However, since the human mind may easily be distracted by external attractions and deceived by the devil, these two ways of contemplation are possible but proven to be inefficient. Under this situation,

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<sup>336</sup> *C. Gent.* 4 (Thomson, pp.10-12).

<sup>337</sup> M. A. McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology* (Malden and Oxford, 1998), p.11.

<sup>338</sup> *C. Gent.* 29 (Thomson, pp.80-82).

<sup>339</sup> For a discussion of men’s lapse and Christ’s salvation, see part B.1 of this chapter.

<sup>340</sup> *Or. Ar.* 3.66 (PG 26, col.464). See also *Or. Ar.* 1.61, 3.3, 3.5-6 (PG 26, col.140, 328, 329-332).

<sup>341</sup> Athanasius applies this rule not just to the monks and virgins, but also to the general congregation. For discussions of his teachings to these people, see Chapter Two of this thesis.

<sup>342</sup> *C. Gent.* 2 (Thomson, p.6).

<sup>343</sup> *C. Gent.* 31, 33 (Thomson, p.86, 90).

<sup>344</sup> See part A.2.b of this chapter.



Athanasius following his predecessors suggests that the Scriptures (Γραφαί) are the best means to obtain the knowledge of God for they are sacred (ἅγιοι) and divinely inspired (θεόπνευστοι). Only these books did he describe as sufficient for the exposition of the truth (τὴν τῆς ἀληθείας ἀπαγγελίαν).<sup>345</sup> Concerning the Scriptures, A. Pettersen is right in saying that they not only complement God's general revelation through creation but in fact give 'fuller teaching.'<sup>346</sup> So, study of the Scriptures is very important. To gain some notion of the interpretation of the Scriptures and thus attain the biblical knowledge, believers may read the expository treatises of 'our blessed teachers' (τῶν μακαρίων ἡμῶν διδασκάλων).<sup>347</sup> However, in spite of this, Athanasius still asserts that not everyone can understand the allegorical and spiritual meanings of the sacred words. Only those with pure soul (καθαρά ψυχή) and virtuous life (καλὸς βίος) can apprehend the Scriptures.<sup>348</sup>

## ii) Pure Soul (καθαρά ψυχή)

In the extant Athanasian writings preserved in Greek, the words with the same root as καθαρά appear 97 times in total, more than half of which are in the adjectival form καθάρως.<sup>349</sup> However, if one includes also the appearance of 'pure' or 'purity' in the writings not preserved in Greek, especially the virginal letters which elaborated the topics on purity in detail, the figure must be much higher. The adjective καθάρως fundamentally means 'pure.' In patristic writings, it was widely applied to God, created spirits, the heavenly life, Christians, Christian activities, and ritual.<sup>350</sup> Its noun καθαρότης has four basic uses, namely divine *purity*, the relationship between divine and human *purity*, *purity* in spiritual life, and *purity* as a style of addressing bishops. Amongst them, the third one is the most popularly adopted by the fathers including Athanasius. When applying to the spiritual life, καθαρότης was generally accepted in the early church as necessary for contemplation and union with God, for acquirement of divine knowledge, and for perfection.<sup>351</sup> For Athanasius, a pure soul is one not affected by external distraction, but keeping in its natural state (κατὰ φύσιν) as it was created.<sup>352</sup>

Consistent with other fathers, Athanasius sees purity as a basic requirement for proper contemplation of God. For him, the first created man in pre-lapsarian condition had no obstacle (ἐμπόδιον) to the divine knowledge (γνώσιν). He could continuously

<sup>345</sup> *C. Gent.* 1 (Thomson, p.2).

<sup>346</sup> Pettersen, *Athanasius*, p.47.

<sup>347</sup> *C. Gent.* 1 (Thomson, p.2).

<sup>348</sup> Athanasius says clearly on this point, 'For without a pure mind and a life modelled on the saints, no one can apprehend the words of the saints.' *De Incarn.* 57 (Thomson, p.274).

<sup>349</sup> The Greek word καθάρως appears 54 times, καθαρίζω 20 times, καθαρότης 17 times, καθαρισμός 3 times, καθαρεύω 2 times, and καθάριστος 1 time. Cf. Müller, *Lexicon Athanasianum*, col.692-693.

<sup>350</sup> 'καθάρως,' *PGL*, pp.684-685.

<sup>351</sup> 'καθαρότης,' *PGL*, p.685. The biblical source of this view is Mt. 5:8.

<sup>352</sup> *V. Ant.* 34 (SC 400, p.228).



contemplate (θεωρεῖ) by his purity (καθαρότης) the Image of the Father, God the Word.<sup>353</sup> Quoting the Beatitudes, Athanasius suggests that ‘the purity of the soul (ἡ τῆς ψυχῆς καθαρότης) makes it able to reflect as in a mirror (κατοπτρίζεσθαι) even God by itself.’<sup>354</sup> When the body is lying motionless in bed, the soul often imagines (φαντάζεται) and beholds (θεωρεῖ) things above the earth (τὰ ὑπὲρ γῆν) and meets heavenly figures in the confidence of the purity of its mind (τῇ τοῦ νοῦ θαρροῦσα καθαρότητι).<sup>355</sup> Being like a mirror (κάτοπτρον), the human soul reflects the divine reality; the more obstacles it has, the more ambiguous the reflected image is. So to contemplate God accurately, a pure soul is necessary.<sup>356</sup> Since the heretics do not have a pure mind (ἐπεὶ τὴν διάνοιαν οὐκ ἔχουσι καθαρὰν), they cannot bear to hear the words of divine men who teach of God (θείων θεολόγων ἀνδρῶν), but learn from the demons.<sup>357</sup>

In Athanasius’ opinion, discriminating pure from impure (διακρίνοντες καθαρὰ καὶ ἀκάθαρτα) and becoming acceptable to God (εὐάρεστοι γινόμενοι τῷ Θεῷ) is something transmitted from the Lord through the patriarchs.<sup>358</sup> To keep the soul pure, one must cast off all human desires and put off every stain of sin. Concerning the former, he proposes explicitly that men should cast off the stain of all desire which they had put on (ὃν ἐνεδύσαντο ῥύπον πάσης ἐπιθυμίας ἀπόθωνται), and wash themselves (τοσοῦτον ἀπονίψωνται), until they have eliminated every addition foreign (πᾶν τὸ συμβεβηκὸς ἀλλότριον) to the soul and showed it alone (μόνην) as it was made. In this way, they may be able to contemplate (θεωρῆσαι) the Word of the Father (τὸν τοῦ Πατρὸς Λόγον), in whose image they were made in the beginning.<sup>359</sup> About the second condition for keeping the soul pure, he explains clearly that when the soul has put off every stain of sin (πάντα τὸν ῥύπον τῆς ἀμαρτίας) and kept pure only what was in the image (μόνον τὸ κατ’ εἰκόνα καθαρὸν), it can truly behold (θεωρεῖ) as in a mirror (ἐν κατόπτρῳ) the Word and in him meditate (λογίζεται) on the Father.<sup>360</sup> It is under this understanding that Athanasius advocated believers everywhere to purify their souls through ascetic practices.<sup>361</sup>

Regarding the purification of the soul, it is necessary to make a remark here that Athanasius considers both the soul and the body as good creation of God. Although the concept that only a pure soul can see God originated from Platonism, the bishop nowhere

<sup>353</sup> *C. Gent.* 2 (Thomson, p.6).

<sup>354</sup> *C. Gent.* 2 (Thomson, pp.6-8).

<sup>355</sup> *C. Gent.* 33 (Thomson, p.90).

<sup>356</sup> Cf. *C. Gent.* 34 (Thomson, p.94).

<sup>357</sup> *Ad Aeg. Lib.* 14 (PG 25, col.569).

<sup>358</sup> *De Decretis* 5 (PG 25, col.432).

<sup>359</sup> *C. Gent.* 34 (Thomson, pp.92-94).

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>361</sup> For discussions of Athanasius’ ascetic teachings, see Chapter Two of this thesis.

suggests the sense of the soul being punished by the embodiment.<sup>362</sup> The reason for taking ascetic practices is not to deny the body, but to control bodily desires only. As A. Pettersen has shown, the body is for Athanasius the vehicle or instrument through which the soul relates to the world and the world to the soul.<sup>363</sup> The real problem here is that since the desires of the body frequently mingle with it from outside, they prevent the soul from obtaining true knowledge of God. On this point, D. B. Brakke is right in suggesting that the purpose of the human ascetic task is to keep the body and its desires subject to the rule of the rational mind, and to keep the soul pure by ignoring the body's desires and taking pleasure only in God.<sup>364</sup> The soul and the body are not antithetic.

### iii) Virtuous Life (καλός βίος)

In Athanasius' extensive texts preserved in Greek, words with the same root as καλός appear 257 times, amongst which 119 times are in adjectival form καλός and 138 times in adverbial form καλῶς.<sup>365</sup> These are words widely used in patristic writings. The basic meaning of καλός is beautiful, good, fair, right and virtuous. When used of man, it refers to *perfect* and *excellent* in character and morals.<sup>366</sup> Another word Athanasius often uses to denote virtue is ἀρετή, which emerges 85 times in total.<sup>367</sup> In the early church, it was variously employed to describe the goodness of things, of men, of angels, and in relation to God. When applied to men, it may imply moral excellence, particular forms of virtue, or virtuous nature and character in general.<sup>368</sup> These two terms primarily refer to the same thing. Athanasius almost treats καλός as the adjectival form of the noun ἀρετή. Virtue (ἀρετή) is doing what is good (καλός), which has its source from God. For this reason, when the soul turns away from the good (τὰ καλὰ), it moves no longer according to virtue (κατὰ ἀρετήν).<sup>369</sup>

From the very beginning of church history, virtue was regarded as an important element for the perfection of a man. When talking about the character of a Gnostic, Clement asserts that corresponding to the piety of knowledge are the commands respecting the rest of the conduct of life (τὰ περὶ τὴν ἄλλην πολιτείαν ἐπαγγέλματα).<sup>370</sup> For him, a really good man (ὁ τῷ ὄντι ἀγαθὸς ἀνὴρ) is one who has transcended the whole life of passion (ὅλον τὸν ἐμπαθεῖ βίον) through the habit or disposition (κατὰ τὴν

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<sup>362</sup> About Athanasian relationship between the soul and the body, see part A.2.b of this chapter.

<sup>363</sup> Pettersen, *Athanasius and the Human Body*, pp.86-89, 112.

<sup>364</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, p.147.

<sup>365</sup> Müller, *Lexicon Athanasianum*, col.711-714.

<sup>366</sup> 'καλός,' PGL, pp.698-699.

<sup>367</sup> Besides the noun, Athanasius has also used the adjective ἐνάρετος 4 times. Cf. Müller, *Lexicon Athanasianum*, col.147, 488.

<sup>368</sup> 'ἀρετή,' PGL, pp.224-225.

<sup>369</sup> *C. Gent.* 4 (Thomson, p.10).

<sup>370</sup> Clement, *Stromata* 7.10.59 (GCS 17, p.43).

ἔξιν ἢ διάθεσιν) of a soul endued with virtue (τῆς ἐναρέτου ψυχῆς).<sup>371</sup> In his twenty-seventh homily on Numbers, Origen portrays the spiritual journey of a Christian as a combination of the ascension of the mind in knowledge and the progression of the soul in virtues.<sup>372</sup> Following his Alexandrian predecessors, Athanasius values virtues, or goodness, highly in his writings. As explained before, to exist is for him to be good. Mere faith (πίστις) in Christ can only lead men to the hope of salvation and is insufficient. To obtain immortality (ἀθανασία) and inherit the kingdom of heaven (βασιλεία οὐρανῶν), one must maintain good by obeying God.<sup>373</sup> Such goodness is primarily manifested in one's virtuous life. Discussing men's likeness to God, he alleges that men cannot become like God in essence (κατ' οὐσίαν), but by progress in virtue (ἐξ ἀρετῆς βελτιούμενοι) imitate Him.<sup>374</sup>

Here, the relationship between knowledge and virtue is especially noteworthy. Basically, virtues for Athanasius may be defined as obedient deeds matching the knowledge one receives through divine contemplation.<sup>375</sup> They are parallel and both are natural consequences of continuous contemplation. Nonetheless, as in the case of the relationship of contemplation and knowledge, because of the human free will, the acquisition of knowledge does not guarantee the progression in virtues. Since the ultimate object of divine contemplation is God Himself, a virtuous life is a life with virtue according to Christ (ἡ κατὰ Χριστὸν ἀρετή), which was modelled on the saints.<sup>376</sup> Men become virtuous (ἐνάρετοι) and sons (υἱοί) by imitation (κατὰ μίμησιν) of the Son, looking at Him and taking Him as an exemplar.<sup>377</sup>

For Athanasius, virtue is also a spiritual weapon against the evil power. Those who are brought up in Christ (οἱ Χριστῷ μαθητευόμενοι) should oppose the demons with their lives and virtuous deeds (τοῖς τρόποις καὶ ταῖς κατ' ἀρετὴν πράξεσιν).<sup>378</sup> Such Athanasian virtue not only involves merciful acts to others, but also temperate attitude towards demonic attacks. It includes remaining virgins of Christ, embracing monastic life, focusing on Christian asceticism, devoting oneself to prayer, and performing acts of

<sup>371</sup> Clement, *Stromata* 7.11.65 (GCS 17, pp.46-47).

<sup>372</sup> Origen, *Homiliae in Numeros* 27.6 (PG 12, col.787).

<sup>373</sup> For example, Athanasius writes, 'If you have pious faith in him, O lover of Christ, rejoice and be of good hope, because the fruit of faith in him and of piety is immortality and the kingdom of heaven, but only if your soul is disposed according to his laws.' *C. Gent.* 47 (Thomson, p.132).

<sup>374</sup> *Ad Afr.* 7 (PG 26, col.1041).

<sup>375</sup> Athanasius sometimes parallels obedience with virtue. Those who live in obedience are those who travel the path of virtue. Cf. *C. Gent.* 47 (Thomson, p.132).

<sup>376</sup> *De Incarn.* 57 (Thomson, p.274).

<sup>377</sup> *Or. Ar.* 3.19-20 (PG 26, col.364). In another passage, Athanasius further explains that men acquire the imitation of God from virtue (ἐξ ἀρετῆς) on the ground of observance of the commandments (διὰ τὴν τῶν ἐντολῶν τήρησιν). Cf. *De Decretis* 20 (PG 25, col.452).

<sup>378</sup> *De Incarn.* 52 (Thomson, p.264).

charity to each other.<sup>379</sup> Virtuous men are for him those who are constant in temptations (ἐν πειρασμοῖς ὑπομένειν), endure in troubles (ἐν πόνοις καρτερεῖν), bear insults (ὑβριζομένους ἀνέχεσθαι) and disregard deprivations (ἀποστερουμένους καταφρονεῖν).<sup>380</sup> While seeing the virgins of Christ (αἱ Χριστοῦ παρθένοι) as the demonstration of virtue (τῆς ἀρετῆς τὸ γνῶρισμα), as other fathers, Athanasius regards becoming martyrs of Christ (μάρτυρες Χριστοῦ) as the highest virtue for believers.<sup>381</sup>

On the way to God, virtuous life has two major functions, namely cleansing one's soul and directing men to the true knowledge of God. To keep the soul pure, one must cast off all bodily desires and put off every stain of sin. However, not only negative and preventive acts are necessary. Positively, one must also cleanse (προαπονίψαι) and wash (προαποπλύναι) the soul with virtuous conduct.<sup>382</sup> Besides, virtuous life also helps men in apprehending the knowledge of God. Since the divine knowledge was initially revealed to the saints, to understand what they have written, one must approach them in the imitation of their deeds.<sup>383</sup> Indeed, as we have illustrated, divine contemplation and virtuous life are synchronous and closely related. Since God is the source of goodness, divine contemplation motivates the pursuit of good and hence the advancement of virtue. The advancements of the two are coherent and overlapped. As Athanasius himself writes in a festal letter, 'The one who believes (πιστεύων) in Him is godly, and the one also who is godly believes the more (πιστεύων ἔτι).'<sup>384</sup> Conversely, when men turned their minds away from God, they immediately lost their goodness, left their virtuous lives and became enslaved by sin. For this reason, Athanasius does not make clear distinction between intellectual and moral advancement. He just treats them as one single journey.

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<sup>379</sup> When talking about the Alexandrian church after his returning from the second exile, Athanasius writes, 'Accordingly great was their joy, the people in the congregations encouraging one another in virtue (εἰς ἀρετὴν). How many unmarried women, who were before ready to enter upon marriage, now remained virgins of Christ (ἐμειναν παρθένοι τῷ Χριστῷ)! How many young men, seeing the examples of others, embraced the monastic life (τὸν μονήρη βίον ἠγάπησαν)! How many fathers persuaded their children, and how many were urged by their children, not to be hindered from Christian asceticism (μὴ ἐμποδίζεσθαι τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ ἀσκήσεως)! How many wives persuaded their husbands, and how many were persuaded by their husbands, to give themselves to prayer (σχολάζειν τῇ προσευχῇ), as the Apostle has spoken! How many widows and how many orphans, who were before hungry and naked, now through the zeal of the people (ἐκ πολλῆς τῆς τῶν λαῶν προθυμίας), were no longer hungry, and went forth clothed! In a word, so great was their emulation in virtue (ἄμμιλλα περὶ ἀρετὴν), that you would have thought every family and every house a church, by reason of the goodness of its inmates, and the prayers which were offered to God.' *Hist. Ar.* 25 (PG 25, col.721-724).

<sup>380</sup> *De Incarn.* 52 (Thomson, pp.264-266).

<sup>381</sup> *De Incarn.* 48, 52 (Thomson, p.254, 266).

<sup>382</sup> *De Incarn.* 57 (Thomson, p.274).

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.* From this cause, Athanasius urges his followers eagerly to imitate the saints. For a discussion of this teaching, see Chapter Two part B.1 and B.2.c of this thesis.

<sup>384</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 11.9 (Cureton, p.ϣ).



### c) Progress on the Way to God

Responding to a challenge from the opponents about the explanation of Luke 2:52, 'And Jesus advanced (προέκοπτε) in wisdom (σοφία) and stature (ἡλικία), and in grace (χάριτι) with God and man,' Athanasius discusses at length the 'advance' of Jesus in a discourse against the Arians. Since the humanity of Christ is an archetype and first born (πρωτότοκος) of the new creation, this discussion is an invaluable source for us to understand his concept about the process of spiritual advancement. First of all, Athanasius emphasises that theoretically the Son, who is God, could not have any advance. He questions, 'How had the Son increase (αὐξάνειν), being ever in the Father?'<sup>385</sup> Then he uses several arguments to sustain his view.<sup>386</sup> Using vocabulary from Philippians 3:13, Athanasius points out that men, who are creatures, are 'capable in a certain way of "reaching forwards" (ἐπεκτείνεσθαι) and advancing (προκόπτειν) in virtue (ἐν ἀρετῇ).' Quoting Enoch, Moses, Isaac, and Paul as example, he shows that every man 'had room for advancing, looking to the step before him (τὸν ἔμπροσθεν αὐτοῦ βαθμόν).' Summing up the two points above, Athanasius concludes that 'advance' by nature belongs to men, and not to the Son. Concerning the advance of Jesus mentioned in the Scriptures, he explains that it is due to humbleness. The Son 'humbled (ἐταπείνωσεν) Himself for us, that in His humbling (ἐν τῷ ἐκείνου ταπεινῶ) we on the other hand might be able to increase (αὐξῆσαι).'<sup>387</sup> However, the bishop maintains that it was not the divinity of the incarnate Christ who advanced, but His humanity. He writes clearly on this point, 'It was not then the Word (ὁ Λόγος), considered as the Word, who advanced...but humanly (ἀνθρωπίνως) is He here also said to advance, since advance belongs to man.'<sup>388</sup>

From these passages, it is clear that Athanasius conceives the life of a Christian as a continuous spiritual journey. On the way, man may even 'reach forth (ἐπεκτείνεσθαι) day by day (καθ' ἡμέραν) to what is before him (τοῖς ἔμπροσθεν).' Since the one and only Son is always in the Father, all things advance by looking at Him (πάντα εἰς αὐτὸν βλέποντα προκόπτει), or more specifically by contemplating Him.<sup>389</sup> Echoing our previous findings,

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<sup>385</sup> *Or. Ar.* 3.51 (PG 26, col.429).

<sup>386</sup> On this point, Athanasius argues that if the Son who was ever in the Father advanced, there should be something beyond the Father (ἐπέκεινα τοῦ Πατρὸς) from which the advance might be made. This implies that God was originally imperfect (ἀτελής). Since others through participating in Him can become all-perfect (παντέλειος) amongst men, He must be perfect. Since He is the Wisdom (ἡ Σοφία), there should not be any advance in wisdom in Him. Also, as He is the one who gives grace to others (ὁ ἄλλοις χάριν διδούς), He Himself could not have any advance in grace. Cf. *Or. Ar.* 3.51 (PG 26, col.429-432).

<sup>387</sup> *Or. Ar.* 3.52 (PG 26, col.432).

<sup>388</sup> *Or. Ar.* 3.52 (PG 26, col.432-433). Also, Athanasius says in the same passage, 'To advance in wisdom is not the advance of Wisdom Itself (τὴν Σοφίαν αὐτήν), but rather the manhood's (τὸ ἀνθρώπινον) advance in It.'

<sup>389</sup> *Or. Ar.* 3.52 (PG 26, col.432).



when the soul contemplates God, it will automatically move towards Him and use its bodily members to follow Him in virtue. Concerning the substance of this advancement, the bishop writes explicitly, ‘And our increase is no other than the renouncing things sensible (τὸ ἀφίστασθαι μὲν τῶν αἰσθητῶν), and coming to the Word Himself (εἰς αὐτὸν τὸν Λόγον).’<sup>390</sup> These statements clearly indicate that the way to God is indeed a contemplative journey from worldly pleasure to divine reality. Again, this resonates with what we have found. The soul always moves between two poles, evil and good, or unreality and reality. In the fall, abandoning the consideration of divine reality, men turned their minds to various and separate desires of the body (τὰς κατὰ μέρος ἐπιθυμίας τοῦ σώματος).<sup>391</sup> On the way to God, Christians should conversely pursue good by turning their minds away from bodily desires, and contemplating absorbedly the Son and through Him the Father. Such contemplation is of course accompanied by pure soul and virtuous life. Athanasius has not defined clearly what will happen in the journey. As mentioned before, what he is most concerned about is not how much one has travelled, but which direction he is travelling.

Following his Alexandrian predecessors, Athanasius conceives the spiritual advancement of Christians as a continuous process requiring constant effort. When being asked about the reason why Jesus said He was ignorant of the day (ἡ ἡμέρα) and the hour (ἡ ὥρα), Athanasius answers that it is for the sake of our profit (τῆς ἡμῶν ἕνεκα λυσιτελείας) that He did this. The Saviour was at that time not replying according to the divine nature (θεϊκῶς), which knows everything, but after the flesh (σαρκικῶς) only.<sup>392</sup> He intentionally concealed from us the day of the end so that ‘we may advance day by day as if summoned (καθ’ ἡμέραν ὡς καλούμενοι προκόπτωμεν), reaching forwards to the things before us (τοῖς ἔμπροσθεν ἐπεκτεινόμενοι) and forgetting the things behind (τῶν ὀπίσθεν ἐπιλανθανόμενοι).’<sup>393</sup> The author further explains that if a man knew the day of the end, he would be dilatory (ὑπερτίθεται) with the interval. Being ignorant, he would be ready (ἕτοιμος γίνεται) day by day.<sup>394</sup> Athanasius has not declared clearly what kind of advancement it is. However, from our previous discussion, we know that both intellectual and moral disciplines are for him a single enterprise. Obviously, this passage is referring to the progression in the ‘combined’ journey.

Although Athanasius has not followed Clement and Origen in labelling Christians of different spiritual progress with specific terms like ‘Gnostic’ and ‘spiritual,’ he does have such categorisation in his mind. For him, a simple (ἀπλοῦς) person is one who is not

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<sup>390</sup> Ibid.

<sup>391</sup> *C. Gent.* 3 (Thomson, p.8).

<sup>392</sup> *Or. Ar.* 3.48 (PG 26, col.424-425).

<sup>393</sup> *Or. Ar.* 3.49 (PG 26, col.428).

<sup>394</sup> Ibid.

thoroughly grounded in knowledge (μὴ κατηχηθεὶς ἰσχυρῶς).<sup>395</sup> Envy men the possession of the knowledge of God, the devil wanders about seeking to snatch away the seed of the Word (τοῦ Λόγου σπέρματα) sown in them.<sup>396</sup> Because simple person considers only the words that are spoken (τὰ λεγόμενα) and does not *contemplate* the meaning (τὴν διάνοιαν), he may easily be drawn away by the wiles (ταῖς μεθοδείαις) of the devil's heresies.<sup>397</sup> In contrast, the truly faithful disciple of the Gospel (ὁ μὲν πιστὸς καὶ τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου μαθητῆς) can stand firm (ἔστηκεν ἐδραῖος) and secure from their deceits continually (ἀσφαλῆς ἀπὸ τῆς τούτων ἀπάτης διαμένων).<sup>398</sup> For this reason, Athanasius eagerly urges people to make progress on the way to God through contemplation. Here, it is noteworthy that Athanasius distinguishes the simple and advanced believers in terms of the firmness of their will. The more a Christian advances, the more firmly he will fix his mind on God. While all other things including knowledge and virtue are natural consequences of divine contemplation, human free will is the only criterion determining the continuous progression of a man. This echoes what we have observed that the spiritual progress is for him measured in terms of desire and purposefulness.<sup>399</sup>

Similar to Methodius, Athanasius suggests that on the way to God Christians should help each other. Having made progress, the advanced believers should assist in bringing up other spiritual children.<sup>400</sup> For this reason, he widely appointed well-established monastic leaders as bishops so that they might not only advance themselves, but also guide others onwards.<sup>401</sup> When talking about the teachings of his predecessor Dionysius, he further suggests that a wise teacher will 'arrange and deliver his lessons with reference to the characters of his pupils (πρὸς τὰ τῶν διδασκομένων ἥθη), until he has brought them over (μεταγάγη) to the way of perfection (εἰς τὴν ὁδὸν τῆς τελειότητος).'<sup>402</sup>

For Athanasius, the results of contemplating God with a pure soul through virtuous life are salvation in the final judgement and participation in the kingdom of heaven. As explained before, such heavenly immortality is not a necessary result of divine contemplation, but is a reward from God. In the *Vita Antonii*, having persevered in discipline until old age, the soul of Amun is reported as having been led up into the air (ἐν τῷ ἀέρι), accompanied by great joy emanating from those who met him (τῶν

<sup>395</sup> *Ad Aeg. Lib.* 4 (PG 25, col.548).

<sup>396</sup> *Ad Aeg. Lib.* 1 (PG 25, col.540).

<sup>397</sup> *Ad Aeg. Lib.* 4 (PG 25, col.548).

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>399</sup> *V. Ant.* 7 (SC 400, p.154).

<sup>400</sup> Methodius, *Convivium Decem Virginum* 3.8 (SC 95, p.110).

<sup>401</sup> *Ad Drac.* 7 (PG 25, col.532).

<sup>402</sup> *De Sent. Dion.* 6 (PG 25, col.488).

ἀπαντώντων).<sup>403</sup> This is obviously the final goal of the spiritual advancement of a Christian for Athanasius. As a summary, the whole Athanasian teachings on spiritual advancement may be seen from the following conclusive passage at the end of his *De Incarnatione*.

He who wishes to grasp the thought of the theologians must first cleanse (προαπονίψαι) and wash (προαποπλύναι) his soul by his life (τῷ βίῳ) and approach the saints (τοῖς ἁγίοις) in the imitation (τῇ ὁμοιότητι) of their deeds (τῶν πράξεων αὐτῶν). So, being included in their company through the manner of his life, he may understand (κατανοήσῃ) those things that have been revealed to them by God. Thenceforth, as if joined to them, he may escape the danger that threatens sinners and the fire that consumes them on the day of judgement (ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῆς κρίσεως), and he may receive what has been reserved for the saints in the kingdom of heaven (ἐν τῇ τῶν οὐρανῶν βασιλείᾳ).<sup>404</sup>

### C. Short Conclusion

As an ancient figure with full humanity, Athanasius was deeply influenced by his own social culture, religious tradition and personal experience. From the background of this fourth-century Alexandrian bishop, we see that his spirituality was moulded by many factors, particularly the teachings of Clement, Origen and Alexander. Amongst them, the controlling factors are what he conceived as the biblical data and the orthodox interpretation of the Nicene Christology. Based on these foundations, Athanasius formed his spirituality and expressed it in his theology. Nearly all deviations of his system from that of Origen may be traceable to his adoption of the Nicene Christology, and the subsequent abandonment of the hierarchical cosmology and the pre-existence of the soul.<sup>405</sup> His theological approaches are natural responses of the communal conceptual belief of his time under his own situation. The theology he formulated is both coherent and consistent, and also reflects his life experience honestly.

In this chapter, we have briefly discussed the theological system of Athanasius, especially those themes related to his spirituality and spiritual teachings. For him, the human race was a good creation of God in the beginning. Having the added grace from God, men could contemplate divine reality, and hence maintain good and live stably. However, they lost all these things and suffered from corruption in the fall. Under this situation, the Son incarnated into the created world. Through His salvific acts, the

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<sup>403</sup> *V. Ant.* 60 (SC 400, p.294).

<sup>404</sup> *De Incarn.* 57 (Thomson, pp.274-276).

<sup>405</sup> Because of the political situation of his time, Athanasius seldom quotes the name of Origen directly. However, his adoption of the Origenist system may easily be seen from the similarity of their thoughts. For Athanasius' dependence on Origen, see also H. Dörries, 'Die *Vita Antonii* als Geschichtsquelle,' *Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen* 14 (1949):188f; A. Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford, 1981), p.77f; and E. P. Meijering, *Athanasius: Contra Gentes* (Leiden, 1984), pp.9-29.

majority of the adverse results caused by the fall were rectified. Responding to this divine salvation, Christians' task is to try their best to walk on the way to God. This way, in which the soul moves towards the divine image reflected by itself, is intellectual by nature. Since the soul is mobile, it moves towards God as it contemplates Him. Such advancement does not just involve enrichment of knowledge, but also progression in virtues. On this way, what precisely Christians should do is to contemplate God with a pure soul through virtuous life. On the one hand, they should contemplate God through focusing on the image of divine reality reflected in the soul, meditating on the beauty and harmony of the creation and studying the Scriptures. On the other hand, to make contemplation possible, they should keep their souls pure by casting off all bodily desires, putting off every stain of sin and, mostly importantly, living a virtuous life modelled on that of the saints. These three things are coherent and synchronous. When one contemplates God, he will spontaneously advance in virtues, which will then further purify the soul and make the subsequent contemplation better. Just like a spiral, all these elements move forwards together. The most crucial thing one needs to do is to keep his human will firmly on divine contemplation.

Here, it is noteworthy that learning to control one's body by ignoring its desires is one of the central themes in Athanasius' soteriology. Walking on the way to God implies turning the mind from worldly unreality to divine reality. Spiritual advancement is for him not just achieved by having an insightful mind on spiritual issues but also by the personal effort to purify one's soul and to live a godly life. Self-formation is one of the main concerns in Christian spirituality. It is under this belief that he wrote his spiritual treatises and promoted the ascetic way of life throughout his episcopacy. It is consistent with these factors that he became a key figure in the fourth-century monastic movement. In the next chapter, we will analyse his ascetic teachings and see how they relate to his personal spirituality as revealed in his theology. As we will see, the two are closely matched with each other. Athanasius' ascetic teachings may be fully explained in terms of his own spirituality.

## II. SPIRITUALITY AND ASCETICISM

In his introduction to a collection of the monastic letters of Athanasius, L. W. Barnard writes, 'A superficial reading of Athanasius's writings might suggest that his main interests lay in Christian dogma and the relationship of Church and State. However, that would be to neglect his interest in, and support of, the monastic movement in Egypt, which in turn supported him during the vicissitudes of his long episcopate.'<sup>1</sup> Truly, no matter for what reason, Athanasius' interest in asceticism is undeniable. In an encyclical letter issued by some Egyptian clergy, the election of Athanasius as the archbishop of the Alexandrian diocese in 328 was reported. Early at the time when he was ordained, Athanasius was acclaimed by his supporters as 'good (σπουδαῖον), pious (εὐλαβῆ), Christian (Χριστιανὸν), one of the ascetics (ἓνα τῶν ἀσκητῶν), a genuine bishop (ἀληθῶς ἐπίσκοπον).'<sup>2</sup> From the beginning, the name 'Athanasius' was associated with asceticism. It is at a very central position in the spiritual teachings of Athanasius. In the classic series of *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, when dealing with the spirituality of Athanasius, nearly the whole discussion is on ascetic topics, such as monasticism and virginity, and ascetic writings, such as the *V. Ant.*, *De Virgin.* and *Ad Drac.*<sup>3</sup> Similarly, asceticism is also a major subject in the entry on Athanasius in the *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*.<sup>4</sup> A bibliographical search will show that whenever the spirituality of Athanasius is touched, the ascetic themes are included. As seen from our extant materials, besides martyrdom, ascetic life is for the bishop the best means for a Christian to complete the way to God.

However, this view has now been challenged by modern critics. In his recent book, D. B. Brakke argues that the ascetic program of Athanasius is actually an intentional political program for church formation.<sup>5</sup> In other words, his emphasis on asceticism was not for a religious purpose, but was merely a political strategy. He transformed radically the Alexandrian spiritual tradition into his own ascetic teachings in order to use them as a tool to stabilise his church. Since the motivation of Athanasius' teachings is important for our understanding of his spirituality, Brakke's arguments will be reviewed and evaluated in this chapter as well. Due to the fact that the authenticity of the ascetic writings of Athanasius is still a developing subject, before we proceed into our analysis of his ascetic teachings, this authorial problem has to be discussed first.

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<sup>1</sup> L. W. Barnard, ed. and tr., *The Monastic Letters of Saint Athanasius the Great* (Fairacres and Oxford, 1994), p.vi.

<sup>2</sup> *Apol. Ar.* 6 (PG 25, col.260).

<sup>3</sup> Bardy, 'Athanasie,' *Dictionnaire de la spiritualité* 1:1047-1052.

<sup>4</sup> Wickham, 'Athanasius of Alexandria, St.,' *DCS*, pp.32-33.

<sup>5</sup> Brakke writes on this point, 'As Athanasius himself understood it, his ascetic programme of self-formation was also a political programme of Church formation.' Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, p.266.



## A. Authenticity of the Ascetic Writings

In his *De viris inlustribus*, Jerome mentions that Athanasius had frequently written on virginity.<sup>6</sup> But what ascetic works did Athanasius actually write? Different scholars have different answers. In the *Patrology* written by O. Bardenhewer, the *V. Ant.*, *Ad Drac.*, *Ad Ors. I-II*, *Ad Amun* and *Ad Mon. I* are listed as authentic ascetic works. At the same time, the genuineness of *De Virgin.*, as well as *Syn. Mon.*, is put in doubt.<sup>7</sup> However, in the *Patrology* of F. Cayre, the Athanasian spiritual writings merely include the *V. Ant.*, *De Virgin.*, *Ser. Virgin.* and *Ad Mar.*<sup>8</sup> With some differences, for A. Dirksen, while the *Quic.* is said to be spurious, only the *V. Ant.*, *Ser. Virgin.*<sup>9</sup> and thirteen festal letters are categorised as true ascetic works of the bishop.<sup>10</sup> In the *Patrology* written by B. Altaner, another list of Athanasian spiritual writings may be found. Although the *V. Ant.*, *Ser. Virgin.* and *Ep. Fest.* are still included as authentic and the *Quic.* as counterfeit, new materials like *Ad Virgin. Cop.*, *Ad Virgin. Syr.*, *De Car. Tem.* and *De Mor. Val.* are introduced.<sup>11</sup>

In the English-speaking world, the most extensive work on patrology nowadays is that written by J. Quasten. In his classic volumes of *Patrology*, under the heading 'Ascetical Writings,' a series of Athanasian works is listed and analysed. Besides *De Virgin.* which is judged as inauthentic, genuine writings discussed include the *V. Ant.*, *Ser. Virgin.*, *Ad Virgin. Cop.*, *Ad Virgin. Syr.*, *De Car. Tem.*, *De Mor. Val.*, *Pra. Virgin.*, *Tra. Ace. Virgin.* and *Fra. Cop.*<sup>12</sup> Moreover, in other parts of the survey, many ascetic epistles, such as *Ep. Fest.*, *Ad Mon. I*, *Ad Amun*, *Ad Drac.* and *Ad Mar.*, are also considered as authentic and are investigated.<sup>13</sup> Obviously, the list of Athanasian spiritual writings has been largely enriched here. However, if we compare it with that in *Clavis Patrum Graecorum*, this list is still incomplete.<sup>14</sup> Some ascetic works, such as *Ad Virgin. Ara.*, *Ad Mon. II*, *Exh. Virgin.* and *Fra. Sin.*, are missing.

Compared with the patrological works, the modern encyclopaedic entries on Athanasius appear to be more disappointing. Their lists of Athanasius' spiritual writings are more incomplete. In his 1979 article in *TRE*, while regarding *Ser. Virgin.* and *Ad*

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<sup>6</sup> Hieronymus, *De viris inlustribus* 87 (TU 14.1, p.44).

<sup>7</sup> O. Bardenhewer, *Patrology: The Lives and Works of the Fathers of the Church*, tr. T. J. Shanhan (Freiburg, 1908), p.258.

<sup>8</sup> Cayre, *Manual of Patrology and History of Theology*, pp.346-347.

<sup>9</sup> Here, Dirksen just writes, 'Athanasius also wrote a work *On Virginity* which was long thought lost but can now be reconstructed.' Whether this work is referring to *De Virgin.* or *Ser. Virgin.* is uncertain.

<sup>10</sup> A. Dirksen, *Elementary Patrology* (London, 1959), p.101.

<sup>11</sup> B. Altaner, *Patrology*, tr. H. C. Graef (Edinburgh and London, 1960), pp.317-320.

<sup>12</sup> Quasten, *Patrology*, vol.3, pp.39-50.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.37, 52-55, 63-65.

<sup>14</sup> *CPG*, vol.2, no.2090-2309; and *CPG Supplement*, no.2090-2329.

*Virgin. Cop.* as doubtful, M. Tetz accepted only *Ep. Fest.*, *Ad Amun*, *Ad Drac.*, *V. Ant.*, *Ad Mon. I-II*, *Ad Mar.* and *Ad Ors. I-II* as genuine. All other Athanasian spiritual writings are left untouched.<sup>15</sup> In the *Dizionario patristico e di antichità cristiane*, G. C. Stead has included only *Ep. Fest.*, *V. Ant.* and *Ad Mar.* as authentic, *De. Virgin.* as spurious, and *Ad Virgin. Cop.* as dubious.<sup>16</sup> Even worse, in the 1997 *EEC*, C. Kannengiesser has mentioned only *Ep. Fest.* and *V. Ant.* in his article. No discussion on Athanasius' other ascetic works may be found.<sup>17</sup>

Why do the outcomes of the scholars appear to be so inconsistent? Undoubtedly, one of the reasons is the increasing publication of ancient manuscripts. Even in scholarly circles, many writings attributed to Athanasius are not well known. Although many ancient sources had already been quite popular centuries ago,<sup>18</sup> a certain number of texts, which are transmitted under the name of Athanasius, have been published only in the last few decades. For example, the first publication of *De Car. Tem.* was in 1927, *Ad Virgin. Syr.* was in 1928, *Ad Virgin. Cop.* was in 1929 and *Fra. Sin.* was in 1955.<sup>19</sup> We cannot expect, for example, O. Bardenhewer to include these materials in his *Patrology*, which was completed at the beginning of the twentieth century. However, on top of this, there is another important reason for the chaotic phenomenon amongst scholars. That is the lack of thorough analysis of the texts. When talking about the ascetic writings of the bishop, B. Altaner confesses, 'The authenticity of the writings or fragments we are about to mention could not so far be proved with certainty.'<sup>20</sup> Although Athanasius was adept in writing Greek, for certain reasons, many old manuscripts attributed to him were preserved in other languages, such as Latin, Coptic, Armenian, Syriac, Arabic and Georgian.<sup>21</sup> Because of linguistic barriers, many such ancient sources were ultimately published without study. As a result, the authenticity of these unexamined materials is

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<sup>15</sup> Tetz, 'Athanasius von Alexandrien,' 4:344-346.

<sup>16</sup> Here, Stead says, 'Many treatises on virginity have been ascribed to A.: that published in PG 28, 252-281 can hardly be authentic, while the incomplete Coptic text published in *Muséon* 42 (1929), with Fr. tr. on pp. 240-264, probably is.' Stead, 'Atanasio,' 1:423-432; 'Athanasius,' 1:93-94.

<sup>17</sup> Kannengiesser, 'Athanasius,' 1:139.

<sup>18</sup> The first collection of Athanasian texts was published in 1482. Cf. P. Brutus, ep. Catharensis, and B. Celsanus, ed., *D. Athanasii libri contra Arrianos et contra gentiles*, Vicentiae, 1482. Later, in the sixteenth century, more than ten similar collections were issued. For a list of these collections, see C. Butterweck, *Athanasius von Alexandrien Bibliographie* (Westdeutscher Verlag, 1995), pp.29-44.

<sup>19</sup> They were published respectively in A. van Lantschoot, 'Lettre de Saint Athanase au sujet de l'amour et de la tempérance,' *Mus* 40 (1927):265-292; J. Lebon, 'Athanasiana Syriaca II: Une lettre attribuée à Saint Athanase d'Alexandrie,' *Mus* 41 (1928):169-216; L. T. Lefort, 'S. Athanase: Sur la virginité,' *Mus* 42 (1929):197-274; and L. T. Lefort, ed. and tr., *S. Athanase: Lettres festales et pastorales en copte*, CSCO 150 (Louvain, 1955), pp.106-109. Cf. *CPG*, vol.2, no.2146-2147, 2150-2151; and Butterweck, *Athanasius von Alexandrien Bibliographie*, p.121, 126.

<sup>20</sup> Altaner, *Patrology*, p.317.

<sup>21</sup> Amongst the writings attributed to Athanasius using languages other than Greek, ten are primarily in Latin, twenty-four in Coptic, twelve in Armenian, five in Syriac, two in Arabic and three in Georgian. For a complete list of these works, see *CPG*, vol.2, no.2090-2309 and *CPG Supplement*, no.2090-2329.

still open to doubt, and various attitudes have been taken by scholars. While some just accept the Latin and Greek texts, many have quoted the rest selectively. Different lists of Athanasian ascetic writings are thus produced.

According to the 1995 *Athanasius von Alexandrien Bibliographie* and the 1998 *CPG Supplement*, over one hundred and sixty works have currently been attributed to Athanasius.<sup>22</sup> Certainly, amongst them, some are genuine and some are spurious. But which one belongs to which? No absolute conclusion can be drawn. In the 1974 *CPG*, all writings under the name of Athanasius are classified into three main groups, namely *Vera*, *Dubia* and *Spuria*.<sup>23</sup> However, after just twenty years, some of them have already been attributed to other authors. Such works do not only include writings originally categorised as spurious, such as *C. Sab.*, but also contain that previously judged as genuine, such as *Ad Eup.*<sup>24</sup> Unless full and persuasive investigations are made, such preliminary categorisations of Athanasian works are still unreliable and are subjected to change.

Concerning the authenticity of the spiritual writings of Athanasius, the most comprehensive evaluation nowadays is D. B. Brakke's 'The Authenticity of the Ascetic Athanasiana.'<sup>25</sup> In this article, the disputed ascetic works under the name of the bishop are examined and assessed one by one under seven rubrics: a) textual witness; b) ancient testimonia; c) evidence for a Greek original, if not preserved in Greek; d) ancient title; e) nature of the work; f) internal evidence for the author's milieu; g) comparison of content with the accepted genuine Athanasiana.<sup>26</sup> Consequently, seventeen works are judged as authentic<sup>27</sup> and eight as inauthentic or uncertain.<sup>28</sup> As the examination of the article is extensive and detailed, and the assessment is in general just and trustworthy, its final judgement is accepted in our study, but with a few remarks.

<sup>22</sup> Butterweck, *Athanasius von Alexandrien Bibliographie*, pp.17-26; *CPG Supplement*, no.2090-2329.

<sup>23</sup> *Vera* (*CPG* 2090-2165), *Dubia* (*CPG* 2171-2220) and *Spuria* (*CPG* 2230-2309). Cf. *CPG*, vol.2, no.2090-2309.

<sup>24</sup> *C. Sab.* (*CPG* 2243=*CPG Supplement* 3674) and *Ad Eup.* (*CPG* 2163=*CPG Supplement* 5655) have now been attributed to Apollinaris and Atticus respectively. For a complete list of such works, see Butterweck, *Athanasius von Alexandrien Bibliographie*, pp.27-28.

<sup>25</sup> D. B. Brakke, 'The Authenticity of the Ascetic Athanasiana,' *Orientalia* 63 (1994):17-56. This article is a revision of his doctoral thesis. Cf. Brakke, 'St. Athanasius and Ascetic Christians in Egypt,' chap.1.

<sup>26</sup> The Athanasian works which Brakke considers as genuine and has used as reference are: *C. Gent.*, *De Incarn.*, *Ad Aeg. Lib.*, *Or. Ar.*, *Ad Serap.*, *Ad Epic.*, *Ad Mar.*, *Ad Adelph.*, *Ad Max.*, *Ep. Fest.*, *Ad Ors. I-II*, *Ad Amun*, *Ad Ruf.*, *Ad Mon. I-II*, *De Decretis*, *De Sent. Dion.*, *Apol. Fuga*, *Apol. Ar.*, *Ad Episc.*, *Ad Serap. M. Ar.*, *Hist. Ar.*, *De Syn.*, *Apol. Const.*, *Ad Ioh. Ant.*, *Ad Pall.*, *Ad Drac.*, *Ad Afr.*, *Tom. Ant.*, *Ad Iov.* and *Fra. Cat.* (9).

<sup>27</sup> These seventeen works are: *Ad Amun*, *Ad Drac.*, *Ad Mar.*, *Ad Ors. I*, *Ad Ors. II*, *Ad Mon. I*, *Ad Mon. II*, *V. Ant.*, *Ad Virgin. Cop.*, *Ad Virgin. Syr.*, *Ser. Virgin.*, *De Mor. Val.*, *Fra. Cop.*, *De Car. Tem.*, *Exh. Virgin.*, *Ad Virgin. Ara.* and *Fra. Sin.* (ap. Shen. 1).

<sup>28</sup> These eight works are: *Fra. Sin.* (ap. Shen. 2), *Fra. Sin.* (ap. Mos.), *Fra. Sin.* (ap. Con.), *Pra. Virgin.*, *All. Mon.*, *Test. Script.*, *De Virgin. Syr.* and *V. Syncl.*.

First of all, one should note that the assessment of the authenticity is not clear black and white. Between the absolutely genuine and the purely inauthentic, there exists a grey area of uncertainty. The works accepted as authentic are only those with higher possibility of being Athanasian, and the ones rejected are those with lower. While some doubtful elements still reside in the judgement, the final inference is neither conclusive nor unchangeable. For example, according to the article, *Ser. Virgin.* is accepted as authentic 'with hesitation.'<sup>29</sup> At the same time, when evaluating *Pra. Virgin.*, because of the briefness of the text, Brakke judges, 'it seems prudent not to accept the authenticity of this work until more of it is known.'<sup>30</sup> It seems that their authenticity has not been totally settled. All these works are ready for future re-evaluation. Secondly, although eight works are excluded from the list of authentic writings, they are not all spurious. At least, in view of their internal and external evidential supports, four of them could not be considered as inauthentic at the moment. Rather, they are dubious only. Such works include *Fra. Sin.* (ap. Shen. 2), *Fra. Sin.* (ap. Mos.), *Fra. Sin.* (ap. Con.), and *Pra. Virgin.*. Since these fragments or excerpts are too brief to make certain judgement, for caution, they are not treated as authentic. However, one should note that their contents have nothing contradicting Athanasius' usual teachings on virginity, and present no obstacle to authenticity.<sup>31</sup>

In Brakke's article, two well-known ascetic works, *De Virgin.* and *Tra. Ace. Virgin.*, have been left unassessed. For completeness, their authenticity is briefly discussed here. *De Virgin.* was first published in Latin by D. Erasmus in 1527. And afterwards, more than twenty different editions followed.<sup>32</sup> Traditionally, it was attributed to Athanasius of Alexandria. However, in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, it suddenly became the object of a severe debate. Because of several passages in the treatise that appeared inconsistent with Athanasius' own style, in 1893 P. Batiffol judged it doubtful. Responding to this challenge, in 1905 E. von der Goltz published a new critical edition of the treatise and strongly defended its authenticity. However, in 1955 M. Aubineau re-examined the Athanasian writings on virginity. As a result, on account of its vocabulary, style and attitude, *De Virgin.* was assessed as inauthentic again.<sup>33</sup> After that, treating the treatise as spurious gradually became a norm amongst scholars. Naturally,

<sup>29</sup> Brakke, 'The Authenticity of the Ascetic Athanasiana,' p.30.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.43.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp.40-43.

<sup>32</sup> For a list of these editions, see Butterweck, *Athanasius von Alexandrien Bibliographie*, pp.108-109.

<sup>33</sup> P. Batiffol, 'Le περί παρθενίας du pseudo-Athanase,' *Römische Quartalschrift* 7 (1893):275-286; E. von der Goltz, *Λόγος σωτηρίας πρὸς τὴν παρθένον: eine echte Schrift des Athanasius*, TU 29, 2a (Leipzig, 1905), pp.1-144; M. Aubineau, 'Les écrits de S. Athanase sur la virginité,' *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* 31 (1955):144-151. Their viewpoints are summarised in *CPG*, vol.2, no.2248; and Quasten, *Patrology*, vol.3, p.45.



this position is also taken in our study. Concerning *Tra. Ace. Virgin.*, less extensive study has been made for it. This Coptic fragment was first published in 1951 by L. T. Lefort, and was republished by the same editor in 1955.<sup>34</sup> The original manuscript has no title, and its beginning and end are mutilated. As the text praises virginity in a similar way as *Pra. Virgin.*, J. Quasten suggests that they belong to the same work.<sup>35</sup> In the treatise, the author presents a long list of Old Testament saints who have been blessed by God, and then commends virginity. In general, its content and style agree with those of Athanasius. However, like other similar fragments, since the text is too brief to make a certain judgement, it is regarded as dubious.

Summing up what we have discussed above, the following ascetic writings are accepted as Athanasian, with (a) to (q) authentic and (r) to (v) dubious. Since the validity of the dubious ones has not been fixed, their contents will not be quoted in our study.

- a) *Ad Amun*, preserved in Greek.<sup>36</sup>
- b) *Ad Drac.*, preserved in Greek.
- c) *Ad Mar.*, preserved in Greek.
- d) *Ad Ors. I*, preserved in Greek.
- e) *Ad Ors. II*, preserved in Greek.
- f) *Ad Mon. I*, preserved in Greek.
- g) *Ad Mon. II*, preserved in Greek.
- h) *V. Ant.*, preserved in Greek.<sup>37</sup>
- i) *Ad Virgin. Cop.*, preserved in Coptic.
- j) *Ad Virgin. Syr.*, preserved in Syriac.
- k) *Ser. Virgin.*, preserved in Syriac and Armenian.
- l) *De Mor. Val.*, preserved in Greek.
- m) *Fra. Cop.*, preserved in Coptic.
- n) *De Car. Tem.*, preserved in Coptic.
- o) *Exh. Virgin.*, preserved in Greek.
- p) *Ad Virgin. Ara.*, preserved in Arabic.
- q) *Fra. Sin.* (ap. Shen. 1), preserved in Coptic.
- r) *Fra. Sin.* (ap. Shen. 2), preserved in Coptic.
- s) *Fra. Sin.* (ap. Mos.), preserved in Coptic.

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<sup>34</sup> L. T. Lefort, 'Encore un "De Virginitate" de saint Athanase?' *Mélanges de Ghellinck*, Museum Lessianum Section Historique 13 (Gembloux, 1951), pp.216-218; Lefort, *S. Athanase: Lettres festales et pastorales en copte*, pp.101-106.

<sup>35</sup> Quasten, *Patrology*, vol.3, p.49.

<sup>36</sup> Treatises (a) to (g) are commonly accepted as authentic. Brakke has no specific exposition on them.

<sup>37</sup> Brakke's article has no discussion on this hagiography. Because of the complexity of the problem, its authenticity is dealt with separately in the next chapter. Cf. Chapter Three part A.1 of this thesis.



- t) *Fra. Sin.* (ap. Con.), preserved in Coptic.
- u) *Pra. Virgin.*, preserved in Coptic.
- v) *Tra. Ace. Virgin.*, preserved in Coptic.

## B. Athanasius' General Views on Asceticism

'Asceticism' is derived from the Greek feminine noun ἄσκησις meaning 'exercise, practice, training.'<sup>38</sup> Its verb ἀσκεῖω refers to the training of an athlete or soldier. From Herodotus and Xenophon, it was also applied to virtue. A long tradition, renewed by Epictetus, considered φύσις (inborn quality), μάθησις (knowledge) and ἄσκησις (exercise) as complementary parts in success.<sup>39</sup> Murray's dictionary defines asceticism as 'The principles or practice of the Ascetics; rigorous self-discipline, severe abstinence, austerity.'<sup>40</sup> It is a range of responses to social, political, and physical worlds often perceived as oppressive or unfriendly, or as stumbling blocks to the pursuit of heroic personal or communal goals, life styles, and commitments.<sup>41</sup> In church history, the term denotes practices employed to combat vices and develop virtues. Besides, it also means the renunciation of various facets of customary social life and comfort or the adoption of painful conditions for religious reasons.<sup>42</sup> Generally, an ascetic (ἀσκητής) refers to one retired into solitude, to exercise himself in meditation and prayer, and in the practice of rigorous self-discipline by celibacy, fasting, and toil.<sup>43</sup>

Asceticism is not specifically or distinctively Christian, but is widely found in human history. It runs from antiquity to modernity, from the east to the west. Different religious frameworks have different ascetic outlooks. In Hinduism, the divine element dormant in the human soul is awakened through meditative prayers. Buddhism has an organised monastery to help the monks to liberate themselves from the earthly distresses, and thus enable them to reach a state of tranquil calmness by training the soul's intrinsic powers. In Hellenism, the cult of heroes hastened the formation of a class of supermen who could withstand arduous ascetic situations. By formulating a dualistic cosmology, Plato provided the philosophical basis of asceticism in late-antiquity. He called forth the liberation of one's soul from his body. Very often, such spiritual freedom of the inner self and the subsequent contemplation of reality were considered to be enhanced by ascetic

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. 'ἄσκησις,' *PGL*, p.244.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. J. Gribomont, 'Ascesis—Ascetic,' *EEChu* 1:83.

<sup>40</sup> J. A. H. Murray, ed., *A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles* (Oxford, 1888), vol.1, p.483.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. W. O. Kaelber, 'Asceticism,' *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. M. Eliade, (New York, 1987), 1:441-445; V. L. Wimbush, ed., *Ascetic Behavior in Greco-Roman Antiquity: A Sourcebook* (Minneapolis, 1990), p.2.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. 'Asceticism,' *ODCC*, p.113.

<sup>43</sup> Murray, *A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, vol.1, p.483.

practices.<sup>44</sup> It seems that this withdrawal from the world was also a fundamental dogma of Stoicism.<sup>45</sup>

Although the underlying doctrines vary, the ultimate motivations for ascetic practice are similar. Basically, the driving force of asceticism is, as H. Chadwick says, 'a renunciation of success in the world.'<sup>46</sup> By separation and withdrawal from the lower physical world, one may purify and free oneself for the pursuance of the higher spiritual realm. Regardless of the religious origin, those who undertook the ascetic regimen sought not the practice itself, but the positive end, self-transcendence or self-sanctification, after it. So, J. E. Goehring defines, 'Asceticism denotes the voluntary exercise of self-denial designed to separate the individual from the human world and thereby facilitate access to the divine. The holiness and otherness of the divine lie at the heart of ascetic practice.'<sup>47</sup> Here, the major difference of Christianity, as well as Judaism and Islam, from eastern religions is not the form of ascetic behaviour, but the emphasis on the relationship with God in the discipline. While most others are anthropocentric and concentrate on personal achievement, Christian asceticism acknowledges the inadequacy of human effort and the corresponding reliance on divine aid.

Long ago, the concept of asceticism existed in the Old Testament, especially in the wisdom books such as Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. As a commandment from God, the Jews had to observe certain dietary prohibitions.<sup>48</sup> In order to purify oneself, sexual abstinence was to be kept before certain 'holy' actions.<sup>49</sup> For entreaty or penance, fasting was also needed on some special occasions.<sup>50</sup> Besides, as J. Gribomont observes, all the ideas of close intimacy with God in the desert, the forty days of fasting and the vision on Sinai or Horeb, and the old Rechabite and Nazirite traditions were suited to austerity and led to the secluded life of Qumrân or to John the Baptist.<sup>51</sup> Although asceticism is in general not very popular in the OT, the concept is certainly there and seems to have been growing through the suffering and exile in the later OT periods. A stronger ascetic message may be found in the New Testament. For many Christians in history, the suffering of Jesus and His death on the cross is an ideal exemplar for asceticism and

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<sup>44</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.2.1, 1.2.6-7 (Armstrong, 1:126, 144-146).

<sup>45</sup> Seneca, *Epistulae* 56.6-7 (Summers, pp.62-63). For a thorough discussion of asceticism, see V. L. Wimbush and R. Valantasis, ed., *Asceticism*, New York, 1995.

<sup>46</sup> H. Chadwick, 'The Ascetic Ideal in the History of the Church,' *Studies in Church History* 22, ed. W. J. Sheils (Oxford, 1985), p.2; reprinted in *Heresy and Orthodoxy in the Early Church* (Hampshire and Brookfield, 1991), IX, p.2.

<sup>47</sup> J. E. Goehring, 'Asceticism,' *EEChr* 1:127-130.

<sup>48</sup> E.g. The priests (Lev. 10:9), ordinary laymen (Lev. 11:1-47).

<sup>49</sup> E.g. Seeing God (Exo. 19:15), eating holy bread (1 Sam. 21:5), fighting holy wars (2 Sam. 11:11).

<sup>50</sup> E.g. 1 Sam. 7:6; Est. 4:16; Joel 2:12.

<sup>51</sup> Gribomont, 'Ascesis—Ascetic,' 1:84.

martyrdom.<sup>52</sup> This sacrificial spirit is then transmitted to the disciples in the Lord's call, 'If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself (ἀπαρνησάσθω ἑαυτὸν) and take up his cross (ἄράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ) and follow Me (ἀκολουθείτω μοι).'<sup>53</sup> Such invitation to practise self-abnegation can also be found in other Gospel texts, mostly in a very heavy tone.<sup>54</sup> Besides, the emphases of constant watchfulness, dietary fasting, and the renunciation of marriage and all earthly possessions for the sake of the kingdom of heaven (ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν) also inspired many later Christians to undertake monastic life.<sup>55</sup> Likewise, Paul encourages the struggle of the spirit against the flesh,<sup>56</sup> suggests the abandonment of human desires<sup>57</sup> and commended celibacy.<sup>58</sup> Although J. E. Goehring argues that these messages are eschatologically motivated, their constant influence on the promotion of asceticism in church history is certain.<sup>59</sup>

As Christianity gradually spread throughout the Roman Empire, many ascetic practices seem to have become very popular. In addition to renunciation of marriage and property, some Christians also practised extreme forms of fasting and austerity. Dealing with this growing ascetic trend, the *Apostolic Fathers* remind the participants not to boast.<sup>60</sup> On this issue, the apologists Justin and Athenagoras testified in the mid-second century to the large number of virgins of both sexes in the church and praised them.<sup>61</sup> Irenaeus and Tertullian even acclaimed the martyrs, who renounced their lives in the persecutions, as the very marks and the seeds of the church respectively.<sup>62</sup> Actually, many famous fathers, such as Origen, were themselves faithful followers, teachers and promoters of an ascetic lifestyle as well.<sup>63</sup> Amongst the church fathers, Clement of Alexandria appears to have been the first to provide a theological interpretation of asceticism. Transforming the Platonic idea of ascetic exercises as a release from the

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<sup>52</sup> For example, *Martyrium Polycarpi* records, 'For nearly all the preceding events [the martyrdom] happened in order that the Lord might show us once again a martyrdom (μαρτύριον) which is in accord with the gospel (κατὰ τὸ εὐαγγέλιον).' *Martyrium Polycarpi* 1.1 (Lightfoot & Harmer, p.226).

<sup>53</sup> Mt. 16:24; Mk. 8:34. Origen applies this call to martyrdom. Cf. Origen, *Exhortatio ad Martyrium* 12 (GCS 2, p.12).

<sup>54</sup> E.g. Mt. 10:38; Jn. 12:25.

<sup>55</sup> Watchfulness (E.g. Mt. 24:42, 25:13); dietary fasting (E.g. Mt. 6:16-18; Mk. 2:18-20); renunciation of marriage (E.g. Mt. 19:12); renunciation of earthly possession (E.g. Mt. 19:21; Mk. 10:28; Lk. 9:57-62).

<sup>56</sup> 1 Cor. 9:27; Rom. 8:13.

<sup>57</sup> Gal. 5:16, 24.

<sup>58</sup> 1 Cor. 7:1, 8, 28, 32-35.

<sup>59</sup> Goehring, 'Asceticism,' 1:128. For detailed discussions of asceticism in the Scriptures, see R. Schnackenburg, 'Asceticism,' *Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology*, vol.1, ed. J. B. Bauer (Westminster, 1970), pp.42-46.

<sup>60</sup> *Clementis Epistula* I 38.2 (Lightfoot & Harmer, p.70); Ignatius, *Epistula ad Polycarpum* 5.2 (Lightfoot & Harmer, pp.196-198).

<sup>61</sup> Justin, *I Apology* 15 (PTS 38, p.54); Athenagoras, *Legatio pro Christianis* 33 (PTS 31, pp.104-105).

<sup>62</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 4.33.9 (PG 7, col.1078); Tertullian, *Apologeticus* 50 (PL 1, col.603).

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.3 (PG 20, col.529).

bodily distractions, Clement prompts Christians to follow the ascetic model of Jesus and contemplate God eagerly.<sup>64</sup> For him, such learning from God is a sharing of His incorruptibility (ἀφθαρσία).<sup>65</sup> This idea was later further expanded and established by Origen. Similar to Clement, Origen believes that, as the humanity of Christ was deified, all believers may be deified through contemplation (θεωρία) of and communion (κοινωνία) with the divine.<sup>66</sup> Besides, he also regards martyrdom and asceticism as an expiation of sins and a means of concentrating on God.<sup>67</sup>

Inheriting the teachings of the Scriptures and the earlier fathers, Athanasius also values asceticism highly in his writings. In his *Epistulae Festales*, he urged his congregation to follow a series of ascetic practices.<sup>68</sup> During the time when he was exiled amongst the desert monks, he wrote a hagiography of the deceased Antony and applauded him as an ideal monk.<sup>69</sup> In an epistle to the virgins, he even uses thousands of words to laud virginity and calls it, among other things, ‘fruit-bearing tree’ (ΠΩΗΝ ΝΡΕΨΤΚΑΡΠΟΣ), ‘paradise and house of the Almighty’ (ΠΑΡΑΔΕΙCOC ΔΥΩ ΠΗΙ ΜΠΑΝΤΟΚΡΑΤΩΡ), ‘the glory of God’ (ΠΕΘΟΥ ΜΠΝΟΥΤΕ).<sup>70</sup> Such commendation of ascetics appears also in his apologetic works. In an encyclical missive to all other priests, while charging the outrages of the Arians, Athanasius mentioned specifically their insults on the virgins (παρθένοι) and the monks (μονάζοντες) as if they were the most serious offences in the church.<sup>71</sup> Again, in a protesting letter to Constantius, he accused his opponents of the same indictment and reminded the emperor of the extraordinary honour that his father Constantine and he himself had given to the virgins in the past.<sup>72</sup> It seems that, according to the writings of Athanasius, virgins and monks are role models of piety.

## 1. Basic Ascetic Principles

As discussed in the previous chapter, salvation and spiritual advancement are in a very central position in the theology of Athanasius. Through the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, men’s knowledge of truth was renewed and a way up to the

<sup>64</sup> Clement, *Stromata* 2.22.131-133 (GCS 15, pp.185-186).

<sup>65</sup> Clement, *Stromata* 4.6.27 (GCS 15, p.260).

<sup>66</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum* 3.28 (GCS 2, p.226).

<sup>67</sup> Origen even deems that, in addition to that of Jesus, people may also be ‘redeemed by the precious blood of the martyrs’ (τῷ τιμίῳ αἵματι τῶν μαρτύρων ἀγορασθήσονται). Cf. Origen, *Exhortatio ad Martyrium* 50 (GCS 2, pp.46-47).

<sup>68</sup> See part B.2 of this chapter.

<sup>69</sup> See Chapter Three of this thesis for a discussion of this hagiography.

<sup>70</sup> *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 49 (CSCO 150, pp.95-96).

<sup>71</sup> *Ad Episc.* 3 (PG 25, col.228-229). Similar emphases may also be found in *Apol. Ar.* 15 (PG 25, col.273); *Apol. Fuga* 6, 7 (PG 25, col.652); and *Hist. Ar.* 55, 59, 81 (PG 25, col.760, 764, 793).

<sup>72</sup> *Apol. Const.* 33 (PG 25, col.640).



heaven was opened. Christians should try their best to walk on this way to God by contemplating Him with a pure soul through virtuous life. In addition to doctrinal treatises, such messages may also be found in his pastoral writings, whether to the monks, to the virgins or to the whole congregation. For example, in his *Epistulae Festales* published every Easter, Athanasius repeated once and once again such message as 'Heaven truly is high (ὕψηλός), and its distance from us infinite (ἀπέραντον)...But for us the Lord has consecrated the way (τὴν ὁδὸν) through His blood (διὰ τοῦ ἰδίου αἵματος), and has made it easy (εὐκόλουν).'<sup>73</sup> Just after his succession as the archbishop of Alexandria, by portraying virtues as the food of the soul, he urged the congregation to live in righteousness, temperance, meekness and fortitude.<sup>74</sup> Motivated by his spirituality and theology, he encouraged others everywhere to practise ascetic lifestyle.

In the extant Athanasian writings preserved in Greek, the word ἄσκησις appears 51 times in total.<sup>75</sup> It involves not only one's abstinence from sensual pleasures, but also exercises of virtue. Like many early church fathers, Athanasius uses the word variously in different situations.<sup>76</sup> It is not limited to eremitic or monastic setting, but is applicable to apparently any type of Christian lifestyle.<sup>77</sup> In the *V. Ant.*, Athanasius many times calls the discipline of Antony ἡ ἄσκησις. Apparently, it is a general term covering nearly every individual spiritual exercise that the hermit had taken. Negatively, it may refer to the renunciation of bodily needs, such as food, sex and wealth. Positively, it includes religious practices like prayer and bible study, and also virtuous acts like almsgiving and hospitality.<sup>78</sup> Although the bishop promoted asceticism eagerly throughout his episcopal career, he nowhere treats it as a target. Consistently, he regards it as a means leading to perfection and exaltation only.

According to what we have explored concerning the way to God, asceticism for Athanasius has at least three key theological foundations. Firstly, it helps to clean the soul. Through ascetic practices, one learns to neglect his bodily desires and hence keeps

<sup>73</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 43 (PG 26, col.1440). See also *Ep. Fest.* 5.3 (Cureton, p.37) and 29 (PG 26, col.1436).

<sup>74</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 1.5 (Cureton, p.16).

<sup>75</sup> Müller, *Lexicon Athanasianum*, col.161.

<sup>76</sup> According to Lampe's *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, the word ἄσκησις may refer to different things in patristic writings. They include: 1) study, especially of Scripture; 2) practice, especially of piety; 3) devout life; 4) spiritual exercise, training, discipline; 5) austere life, asceticism; 6) as technical term for eremitic and monastic life and its practices; 7) fruits of asceticism: victory over sin; 8) degrees of asceticism: moderation counselled for beginners; and 9) asceticism taught by pagan philosophers. Cf. *PGL*, p.244.

<sup>77</sup> Athanasius mentions that, in the ancient church, Christian asceticism (ἄσκησις) was taken not only by numerous pious men and women, but also by many little children. Cf. *De Incarn.* 27 (Thomson, p.200); *Hist. Ar.* 25 (PG 25, col.721). From overmuch stringency of asceticism, a pious maiden of Laodicea had grown weak and needed the intercession of Antony. Cf. *V. Ant.* 61 (SC 400, p.298). Indeed, Athanasius himself was also called 'one of the ascetics' (ἐνα τῶν ἀσκητῶν) by his congregation. Cf. *Apol. Ar.* 6 (PG 25, col.260).

<sup>78</sup> *V. Ant.* 3-4, 7, 14, 19, 45, 66, 82, 93 (SC 400, pp.136-138, 150-154, 172, 184, 256, 310, 344, 372).



the soul pure for divine contemplation. Secondly, it is a virtue proposed by the Scriptures and modelled by the saints. In addition to the ascetic messages concealed in the sacred book, asceticism may also find its support from the ancient concept of the saints, especially their impassibility.<sup>79</sup> Finally and most importantly, it implies progression towards God. On the spiritual journey, one moves gradually from one pole of the way, worldly unreality, to the other pole, divine reality. The farther one departs from the earthly needs, the more he has ascended towards the heavens. Since the soul is for Athanasius in control of the bodily members, its contemplative journey is always accompanied by development of virtue. If we define asceticism as denunciation of one's bodily desires, it goes with one's spiritual advancement as well. In this sense, asceticism is not just a kind of virtue, but may be treated as a synonym of virtue itself. From these foundations, we know that ascetic effort for Athanasius has two main functions or purposes. Since ascetic practices can purify the soul and are themselves virtuous deeds, they prepare people to contemplate God and hence make progress on the ascending journey. Besides, upgrade of ascetic disciplines is itself a spiritual advancement. On the way to God, asceticism acts as both a helper and the client himself.

Because asceticism is so important for one's journey to God, Athanasius requests everyone to undertake ascetic practices. In the Greco-Roman world, Gnosticism seems to have gained large support in late-antiquity. As one of its leaders, Valentinus suggests that salvation is achieved by grasping some insightful knowledge of the divine. He divides human beings into three types, namely hylic (χοϊκὸν), psychic (ψυχικὸν) and pneumatic (πνευματικὸν). Amongst them, only the last one is truly intellectual and has the required knowledge. While the second type, the ordinary Christian, needs much effort and struggle, the first one is destined to be destroyed.<sup>80</sup> In contrast with the traditional emphasis on individual intelligence, for Athanasius, the insightful knowledge of God has already been bestowed on men as added grace in the creation and was renewed by Jesus through His life on earth. What Christians need to do is to keep and clarify this knowledge by fixing their eyes on God and walking on the way to Him. Concerning the difference between ascetics and ordinary Christians, he writes to his congregation, 'Not with virgins (ܐܒܬܪܝܢ) alone is such a field adorned, nor with monks (ܚܝܬܐ) alone, but also with honourable matrimony (ܡܬܐ ܡܪܝܬܐ) and the chastity (ܚܝܬܐ) of each one.'<sup>81</sup> He values both virginity and marriage positively. Instead of treating virgins and monks separately, he exhorts, as well as orders, everyone to undertake ascetic exercises. As

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<sup>79</sup> Such concept was promoted by Greek philosophers and was massively imported into the Alexandrian church by Clement. Cf. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism*, pp.84-106.

<sup>80</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 1.7.5 (PG 7, col.517).

<sup>81</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 10.4 (Burgess, p.146).

Brakke observes, for Athanasius, ordinary Christians practise a life of renunciation that differs from that of ascetics only in degree, not in character.<sup>82</sup> Unlike Valentinus, there is no unbreakable barrier between believers in the ascetic model of Athanasius.

What are the fundamental principles governing his teachings on asceticism? As we have seen, virtues are for Athanasius obedient deeds corresponding to the knowledge one receives through divine contemplation. Being equivalent to virtues, ascetic practices are naturally chosen with the same criteria. Since the divine knowledge from the cosmos is abstract and imprecise, Athanasius' ascetic thoughts are primarily drawn from the contemplation of three objects or means: the Scriptures, the saints, and God Himself. Firstly, the teachings of the Scriptures (αἱ διδασκαλίαι τῶν γραφῶν) are for Athanasius the best means to obtain divine knowledge. In his ascetic writings, biblical passages are quoted everywhere. Although he was capable of a very literal exegesis, following Alexandrian tradition he often used the allegorical method to interpret the Scriptures. No matter whether interpreted literally or allegorically, it is clear that he regards the Scriptures as the highest authority amongst Christian literature. For this reason, he lists specifically to his congregation the names of all the canonical books.<sup>83</sup>

The second approach Athanasius employed to develop his ascetic thought is through the contemplation of and hence the imitation of the saints (τό μίμημα τῶν ἁγίων). Concerning this ascetic principle, Brakke says, 'Athanasius distinguished Christians from non-Christians in terms of imitation.' Christians are those who have imitated the behaviour of the saints, and non-Christians are those who have not.<sup>84</sup> From his descriptions of the saints, the most important features of Athanasius' spiritual ideal and hence the ascetic targets for the Christians may be identified. While promoting self-denial, he wrote to his congregation in a festal letter, 'Therefore the present season requires of us, that we should not only utter such words, but should also imitate (μιμεῖσθαι) the deeds of the saints (τὰ ἔργα τῶν ἁγίων).'<sup>85</sup> As the simile of a mirror, successful imitation is for Athanasius equivalent to becoming a mirror image of the imitated models.<sup>86</sup> The prize is as stated before the eternal joy in heaven with the saints.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, p.144.

<sup>83</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 39.4-5 (PG 26, col.1436-1437).

<sup>84</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, p.163. See also Tetz, 'Athanasius und die Einheit der Kirche: Zur ökumenischen Bedeutung eines Kirchenvaters,' p.203; and 'Zur Biographie des Athanasius von Alexandrien,' pp.330-331.

<sup>85</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 5.4 (Cureton, p.38).

<sup>86</sup> Cf. A. Hamilton, 'Athanasius and the Simile of the Mirror,' *VC* 34 (1980):14-18.

<sup>87</sup> Echoing the teachings in his doctrinal treatises, Athanasius says in a festal letter, 'Having imitated the behaviour of the saints, we may enter together into the joy of our Lord which is in heaven, which is not transitory, but truly abides.' *Ep. Fest.* 24.2 (Cureton, p.21).

The last source Athanasius used to establish his ascetic teachings is the direct encounter with God. While the previous two principles are universal in nature and applicable to everyone, this one is personal. For him, the highest virtue of a Christian is to obey the heavenly calling (ἡ κλήσις). So, when Dracontius refused his episcopal office and returned to his monastery, the archbishop immediately wrote a long letter to the monk persuading him to imitate (μιμεῖσθαι) the apostle Paul and accept the call of episcopacy (ἐπισκοπῆς).<sup>88</sup> From this letter of remonstrance, L. W. Barnard concludes that asceticism is for Athanasius for all and is not confined to the monastic life.<sup>89</sup> This conclusion closely matched his own statement in a letter preserved in Syriac, 'For the excellence of virginity is not uniform in its appearance, but of great difference (ܠܗܬܝܬܐܝܬܐ) and variety (ܠܗܬܝܬܐܝܬܐ).'<sup>90</sup> For Athanasius, any type of ascetic model is good and honourable. The only requirement is that it agrees with one's own call.<sup>91</sup>

In his book, D. B. Brakke argues that Athanasius' entire ascetic regime was actually a political program, through which the whole church was united together. He assimilated ascetic values into a vision that could also encompass ordinary Christians. His positive valuation of both marriage and virginity allowed all monks, virgins and other believers to stay in the same church under his control.<sup>92</sup> Besides, Brakke also argues that Athanasius used the ascetic principles, especially imitation, as 'a political act' to create members of an earthly commonwealth. He employed the rhetoric of imitation to encourage behaviour that would enhance church unity under his episcopal organisation and encourage his followers to remain faithful to him.<sup>93</sup> Using these principles, Athanasius was able to claim and establish that the church comprised people at different levels of renunciation. The multiform models of the saints accounted for the church's diversity. Through imitation of them, various ascetic patterns were approved, and the conflict between them was thus reduced. For Brakke, the political result of Christian imitation is a hierarchical church in which diversity is devalued.<sup>94</sup>

This suggestion has rightly pointed out the effect of Athanasius' ascetic regime on church formation, but has wrongly treated the consequence as a motivation. Brakke seems to have exaggerated the political intention of Athanasius' ascetic teachings.

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<sup>88</sup> *Ad Drac.* 4 (PG 25, col.528).

<sup>89</sup> Barnard, *The Monastic Letters of Saint Athanasius the Great*, pp.xii-xiii.

<sup>90</sup> *Ad Virgin. Syr.* 3 (*Mus* 41, p.172).

<sup>91</sup> Here, Athanasius says, 'At another time the call is made to virginity, and self-denial, and conjugal harmony. To virgins, the call is the things of virgins; and to those who love the way of abstinence, the things of abstinence; and to those who are married, the things of an honourable marriage; thus assigning to each its own virtues and an honourable recompense.' *Ep. Fest.* 1.3 (Cureton, p.14).

<sup>92</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, p.12, 145-161.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.165-166.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.12-13, 161-182.

Although some of these ascetic concepts appear to have deviated from the original Alexandrian tradition, they are not alien to the church. On the contrary, nearly all his spiritual teachings have their roots in the Scriptures or the earlier fathers. Although Origen categorises Christians into two types, namely the simple and the spiritual, he nowhere set an absolute boundary between them. Rather, as J. E. Goehring says, he encourages others everywhere to follow his ascetic path to spiritual enlightenment.<sup>95</sup> Clearly, the universal promotion of asceticism did not originate with Athanasius.

All Athanasius' three principles are consistent with the custom of the earlier fathers and the ecclesiastical tradition as well. Concerning the first one, B. Ramsey points out, 'They [the fathers] saw the Bible as the rule against which all philosophy and all human thought were to be measured.'<sup>96</sup> Really, nearly all patristic literature is full of scriptural quotations and allusions. The supreme status of the Scriptures in the teachings of the fathers seems to be an incontestable fact. Also, Athanasius' use of allegorical interpretation is consistent with the Alexandrian tradition at that time. Although his explanations of biblical passages are sometimes different from his predecessors, this is a natural and common phenomenon in the development of doctrine. Again, imitation of the saints was very popular in Athanasius' time. As P. Brown observes, imitation was a usual and essential method of education in late antiquity. At that time, people learned rhetoric by imitating the great rhetoricians, and exercised virtue by imitating the virtuous saints.<sup>97</sup> Concerning the third principle, obedience to the calling of God is unquestionably a clear biblical message. To persuade the recipients to respond to the call, Athanasius himself very often cites scriptural passages to support his arguments. In his first festal letter, he begins with 'Come, my beloved, the season calls (ῥέτω) us to keep the feast.' Then, he quotes over forty biblical verses to illustrate why it is necessary to obey this call.<sup>98</sup> Although some of these citations seem to be misused, many of them are proper. Again, to explain the interrelation of the call to martyrdom and to flee, he adduces Jesus, Paul, Moses, Elijah and David as examples.<sup>99</sup> Indeed, the necessity of a timely vocation had long existed in the mind of the earlier fathers. Clement, for example, warned that those who provoked martyrdom were accomplices in the crime of the persecutors.<sup>100</sup> For the same reason, Cyprian would flee from the authorities until he felt sure that his time for witness had come.<sup>101</sup> Evidently, all the three fundamental principles were not created by

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<sup>95</sup> Goehring, 'Asceticism,' 1:129.

<sup>96</sup> Ramsey, *Beginning to Read the Fathers*, p.22.

<sup>97</sup> P. Brown, 'The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity,' *Saints and Virtues*, ed. J. S. Hawley (Berkeley, 1987), pp.3-14.

<sup>98</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 1 (Cureton, pp.12-20).

<sup>99</sup> *Apol. Fuga* 11-22 (PG 25, col.657-673).

<sup>100</sup> Clement, *Stromata* 4.10.77 (GCS 15, p.282).

<sup>101</sup> Cyprian, *Epistula* 81 (CSEL 3.2, pp.841-842).



Athanasius. What he did is to follow the church tradition and transform existing ideas into his own ascetic system.

Actually, as we have illustrated, all these three ascetic principles are natural products of Athanasius' soteriology, especially those related to the way to God. They are all important objects or means for divine contemplation. As the Scriptures are for him the best means to acquire knowledge of God, the inclusion of their teachings as one of the principles is clearly intelligible. For the second one, we know that the object of contemplation for Athanasius includes not only God Himself, but also other heavenly figures like angels and saints. Such contemplation by definition involves imitation. That is the reason why the incarnate Λόγος is at the same time the object of contemplation and the best imitable model of godly life. As written in *De Incarnatione*, purifying one's soul by imitation of the saints' deeds is indeed a prerequisite for proper comprehension of the revelation of God through them.<sup>102</sup> The reason for the third principle is even more direct and plain. Virtue is for Athanasius equivalent to doing what one knows from God. If God can occasionally reveal Himself to individuals as most ancients believe, treating obedience to one's divine calling as one of the ascetic principles is most natural. Athanasius' theology is basically Christocentric, with salvation and spiritual advancement as the greatest concerns. The rest of his theological thoughts are mostly developed according to them. As we will see, his ascetic teachings can all be deduced either directly from his theology or indirectly through the three ascetic principles above. Athanasius' asceticism is fully consistent with his theology, as well as his spirituality. It is something intrinsic in his mind. The proposal that he politically and intentionally used it as a tool to unite the church is very questionable.

Indeed, if one compares carefully the spiritual teachings of Clement and Origen with that of Athanasius, the difference is not that great.<sup>103</sup> On this issue, D. B. Brakke argues that Athanasius had modified dramatically the Alexandrian spiritual tradition. For the purpose of church formation, he transformed the Origenist intellectual theme with his emphasis on morals, and displaced ignorance and knowledge with corruption and incorruption.<sup>104</sup> He subordinates knowledge to the life of virtue.<sup>105</sup> However, this view has overlooked some important points about the eastern fathers. On the one hand, as shown in the previous chapter, divine knowledge remains crucial in Athanasius' soteriology. For him, the way to God is basically a journey of divine contemplation within one's soul.<sup>106</sup> On the other hand, both Clement and Origen have taught about virtue. In the first book of

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<sup>102</sup> *De Incarn.* 57 (Thomson, p.274).

<sup>103</sup> For discussions of their spiritual teachings, see Chapter One part A.1 and B.2.a of this thesis.

<sup>104</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, pp.145-146.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p.152.

<sup>106</sup> See Chapter One part B.2.a of this thesis.



his *Paedagogus*, Clement portrays the Logos as a tutor instructing believers how to conduct their lives. Here, he writes, 'His aim is to improve the soul (βελτιῶσαι τὴν ψυχὴν), not to teach (οὐ διδάξαι), and to train it up to a virtuous (σώφρονος), not to an intellectual life (ἐπιστημονικοῦ βίου).'<sup>107</sup> Similarly, in his classical dogmatic treatise *De Principiis*, Origen indicates that man has already received the dignity of the image [*imago*] in the creation. However, the perfection of likeness [*similitudo*] is to be obtained through his own industrious efforts by imitation of God.<sup>108</sup> For him, acquirement of divine knowledge is only an initial step for this imitation. After that, one should fight against the passions (πάθη) and the world (κόσμος), two main causes of sin, through right moral and religious conduct in order to reach the perfect likeness.<sup>109</sup> In addition to the intellectual theme, both Clement and Origen have a virtuous or moral element in their theory of perfection, which is definitely congruous with that of Athanasius.

What are the major differences between the spiritual teachings of Athanasius and of his predecessors? Obviously, the most important one is the theological and cosmological context. Because of the adoption of the Nicene Christology, Athanasius has forsaken the hierarchical worldview and has modified the Origenist system accordingly. Instead of contemplating God directly, because of the chasm between Creator and creatures, the Athanasian soul can only contemplate God indirectly through the 'mirror' in itself. Its nature and will can no longer ascend simultaneously to God. While human will can still ascend gradually to heaven as one advances on the spiritual way, human nature for the bishop will truly be transformed by God only after death. For Origen, the soul is pre-existent. The purpose of ascetic practices is to train the soul so that it may gain knowledge of God through contemplation and hence ascend back to Him. In contrast, for Athanasius, man is created out of nothing. Although contemplation and ascension are still emphasised, they are not training, but something crucial to the existence of man. Undeniably, they are all important differences. Nonetheless, they are only limited to conceptual or theoretical level. Besides this, as we can see, their ascetic teachings are 'practically' very similar. Both of them put contemplative and virtuous life together, and promote alike ascetic practices. They both emphasise the necessity of a pure mind. While the Origenist soul always struggles to turn from the flesh to the spirit, the Athanasian soul tries every effort to move from bodily desires to the image of God reflected by itself. They both have similar reasons for taking ascetic exercises. Here, one may argue that

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<sup>107</sup> Clement, *Paedagogus* 1.1.1 (GCS 12, p.90); see also *Paedagogus* 1.4.10 (GCS 12, pp.95-96). On writing this sentence, Clement does not mean that intellectual life is not important. According to his discussion later in the same treatise, intelligence is also important for a Christian, especially at a later stage of his spiritual life.

<sup>108</sup> Origen, *De Principiis* 3.6.1 (GCS 22, pp.279-282).

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Crouzel, *Origen*, pp.92-98; and A. J. Hobbel, 'The *Imago Dei* in the Writings of Origen,' *StP* 21 (1989):304-306.

Clement and Origen seem to have stressed more the intellectual theme than Athanasius. Such apparent differences of the ascetic motive may indeed be explained by the fact that they were living in different historical contexts. On the one hand, in the ongoing dialogue with pagan philosophers and the Gnostics, Clement and Origen put their emphases on the intellectual theme, a common concept at their age, to defend the superiority of Christianity. On the other hand, in the controversy with the Arians, while depressing human intelligence and logical arguments stressed by the opponents, Athanasius built up his ascetic model based on what he believes to be the Nicene Christology.<sup>110</sup> Although the emphases are apparently different, the ‘practical’ teachings are essentially the same.

## 2. General Teachings to the Whole Congregation

In his 350 festal letter, Athanasius wrote to his congregation, ‘Our Lord Jesus Christ, who took upon Him to die for all, stretched forth his hands, not somewhere on the earth (ἐν γῇ) beneath, but in the air itself (ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ ἄέρι), in order that the salvation effected by the cross might be shown to be for all men everywhere by destroying the devil (διάβολον) who was working in the air (ἐν τῷ ἄέρι), and that He might consecrate our way up (ἀνοδον) to heaven (εἰς οὐρανὸν) and make it free.’<sup>111</sup> In contrast with Hellenic intellectual soteriology, for him, the salvation of Christ and the subsequent way to heaven are for all people. In other words, every believer should try his or her best to walk on this way to God with the renewed divine knowledge and ideal provided by the incarnate Word. So, in addition to monks and virgins, Athanasius also requested other Christians to take certain definite ascetic practices.

Amongst the Athanasian ascetic teachings for ordinary Christians, the most dominant are those during Lent and Easter. For him, the Christian Easter is the actualisation of the Passover of the Old Testament, and is in turn an earthly replica of the eschatological feast in heaven.<sup>112</sup> Concerning Passover, he says, ‘The Passover (فصح) is indeed abstinence from evil for exercise of virtue (تدبير), and a departure from death unto life (الحياة).’<sup>113</sup> On this account, he required his congregation to use more prolonged prayers, fasting, and watching during the Christian Pasch in order to ‘anoint our lintels with precious blood, and to escape the destroyer.’<sup>114</sup> Besides, relating to the heavenly feast, Athanasius considers Easter as a holy day, the feast of which is in heaven

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<sup>110</sup> The orthodox interpretation of the Nicene Christology is one of the controlling factors affecting Athanasius’ theological system, which in turn constituted his ascetic teachings. Cf. Chapter One part A.2 and B.2 of this thesis.

<sup>111</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 22 (PG 26, col.1432-1433).

<sup>112</sup> Cf. Camplani, *Le Lettre festali di Atanasio di Alessandria*, p.218.

<sup>113</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 5.4 (Cureton, p.39).

<sup>114</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 14.6 (Cureton, pp.31-32).

with angels.<sup>115</sup> Because of this, it is neither for the impure nor the sinful, but only for the virtuous and diligent.<sup>116</sup> He took this matter so seriously that he even forbade those who had neglected to observe the preparatory forty-day fast to celebrate the festival.<sup>117</sup>

Since most festal letters are preserved solely in Syriac or Coptic, throughout the extant Athanasian writings, the Greek word ἑορτή emerges 17 times only.<sup>118</sup> Like many other fathers, Athanasius applies the word mainly to religious festivals, especially that of Easter.<sup>119</sup> Early in his first festal letter, he has already proclaimed explicitly that both fasting and feasting might be a vocation from God.<sup>120</sup> Regarding the paschal feast, he conveys firmly that it is a divine and incorruptible banquet (τὴν θείαν καὶ ἄφθαρτον ἐστίαν) called by ὁ Λόγος.<sup>121</sup> So, he asked his congregation not to celebrate the feast after an earthly manner, but as keeping festival in heaven with the angels.<sup>122</sup> On this point, he explained, 'For the feast (ܩܝܠܐ) does not consist in pleasant intercourse at meals, nor splendour of clothing, nor days of leisure, but in the acknowledgement of God, and the offering of thanksgiving and of praise to Him.'<sup>123</sup> Clearly, Athanasius' paschal feast is not a physical banquet, but a spiritual one. While other terms such as prayer and vigil may be interpreted literally, special attention should be given to the use of the word 'feast' (ἑορτή, ܩܝܠܐ). It has real external festal joy, but has mainly internal spiritual food. Sometimes, it can even be seen as a synonym of the word 'fast' (νηστεία, ܢܝܣܝܐ).<sup>124</sup> After purification of the soul through virtuous life, Easter is a time for the entire congregation to contemplate God together intensively in a single house.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 10.11 (Cureton, p.51). L. W. Barnard says on this point, 'The Easter Festival is for him [Athanasius] not only a celebration on earth of the facts of the Christian redemption from Christ's incarnation to the gift of the Spirit, but also a mystical anticipation of the eternal and heavenly feast.' L. W. Barnard, 'Some Liturgical Elements in Athanasius' *Festal Epistles*,' *StP* 13 (1975):342.

<sup>116</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 6.11 (Cureton, p.ϡ).

<sup>117</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 19.9 (Cureton, p.ϣ).

<sup>118</sup> Müller, *Lexicon Athanasianum*, col.508-509.

<sup>119</sup> Concerning the patristic use of the word, see *PGL*, pp.504-505. Athanasius has used the word once on general festal joy, twice on Jewish feasts, and 14 times on Christian feasts.

<sup>120</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 1.3 (Cureton, p.14). Here, he says, 'Sometimes the call is made to fasting, and sometimes to a feast.'

<sup>121</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 28 (PG 26, col.1433).

<sup>122</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 6.12 (Cureton, p.ϡ).

<sup>123</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 7.3 (Cureton, p.ϣ).

<sup>124</sup> For example, Athanasius writes in his first festal letter, 'Wherefore, my beloved, having our souls nourished with divine food, with the Word, and according to the will of God, and fasting bodily in things external, let us keep this great and saving feast as becomes us.' *Ep. Fest.* 7 (Cureton, p.17). For a discussion of Athanasius' festal theology, see Badger, 'The New Man Created in God: Christology, Congregation and Asceticism in Athanasius of Alexandria,' chap.3.

<sup>125</sup> Athanasius explains the difference between Christian and heathen feast in terms of spiritual and physical banquet. While the heathens have their feast in abundance of food, Christians keep the feast with sincerity of soul and purity of body. Besides, the bishop also made a distinction between the feast of the schismatics and that of orthodox. While the schismatics keep it in separate places, the orthodox join together in one house. Cf. *Ep. Fest.* 5.4 (Cureton, p.39).

Concerning this paschal feast, D. B. Brakke argues that it was for Athanasius a political program enabling ordinary Christians to realise in a less perfect fashion the control over the body that the monks and virgins achieved. By demanding the entire congregation to undertake ascetic practices, especially during the period from Lent to Easter, he shortened the distance between ascetics and average believers.<sup>126</sup> However, one should note here that virtuous disciplines in festival time had actually deeply rooted in the ecclesiastical tradition.<sup>127</sup> In his letter to Victor around 195, Irenaeus had already talked about the paschal fasting.<sup>128</sup> Besides, Clement also wrote that proper celebration of any feast was the virtuous life.<sup>129</sup> Although believing that virtuous Christians should celebrate the Passover throughout the year, Origen did agree that actual festivals were needed for the multitude so that they would not neglect the matter entirely (ἵνα μὴ τέλειον παραρρηῇ).<sup>130</sup> Certainly, the paschal feast was not something invented by Athanasius. Brakke's suggestion that it was a planned political program is very disputable.

About the spiritual banquet, Athanasius says in a Greek fragment *De Mor. Val.*, 'Indeed, just as the human being with respect to the outer person has bodily bread (τὸν σωματικὸν ἄρτον) for nourishment, so too with respect to the inner person he has its own food.'<sup>131</sup> For Athanasius, this nourishment has its origin from the Lord, for He is 'the bread of life' (ὁ ἄρτος τῆς ζωῆς) and 'a spring of water' (πηγὴ ὕδατος).<sup>132</sup> For there are different kinds of believers in the church, following Alexandrian tradition, Athanasius believes that the Lord would vary Himself according to 'the individual capacity of each soul.' To those who have not attained to the perfect way, He gives milk. To the middle ones, He provides food according to their capacity. But for those who have begun to walk in the perfect way, He feeds them with the Word for bread, and flesh for food.<sup>133</sup> As a holy day marking the salvation of Christ, Easter is for Athanasius an extraordinary time for Christians. In addition to feasting with food of the Lord, it also requires believers to prepare themselves properly with exercises of virtue and practices of temperance.<sup>134</sup> It is a period when Christians should intensify their usual ascetic disciplines. Here, D. B. Brakke is right in observing that the bishop was actually recommending his congregation to take an ascetic program very similar to the virgins during Lent and Easter. It only

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<sup>126</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, p.13, 182-198.

<sup>127</sup> Cf. Badger, 'The New Man Created in God: Christology, Congregation and Asceticism in Athanasius of Alexandria,' pp.153-156.

<sup>128</sup> Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5.24 (PG 20, col.500-504).

<sup>129</sup> Clement, *Stromata* 7.7.35 (GCS 17, p.27).

<sup>130</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum* 8.22-23 (GCS 3, pp.239-240).

<sup>131</sup> *De Mor. Val.* 2 (OCA 117, p.5).

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 10.4 (Cureton, pp.α-υ).

<sup>134</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 3.5 (Cureton, p.αΔ).



differed from the virgins' discipline in two ways: it is temporary and it lacks practices meant to separate oneself permanently from the society.<sup>135</sup> While all the believers are encouraged to walk on the way to God, Easter is a time when the greatest effort should be put. Using our formula explored from his theology, Athanasius' ascetic requirements for ordinary Christians may be categorised as below.

#### a) Contemplation of God (θεωρία Θεοῦ)

According to the theology of Athanasius, maintaining good by contemplating God is something fateful for the corruptibility of man.<sup>136</sup> So, he asked others everywhere to keep this in mind. In a festal letter, he called upon his congregation directly, 'Compel our intellect to keep vigil unto contemplation of good things (ῥῆτλην ἑγρηγῶμεν).'<sup>137</sup> The paschal feast is for him a time for intensive contemplation of divine matters. The results of such contemplation are not just intellectual enlightenment, but also advancement in one's likeness to God in virtue. As discussed in the previous chapter, contemplation and virtue are for Athanasius inseparable. Just as forgetfulness of things divine could lead to immorality and idolatry, the contemplation of God enables a virtuous and godly life.<sup>138</sup>

Following the ecclesiastical tradition, Athanasius regards the Scriptures as the best means to acquire knowledge of God. Besides his doctrinal treatises, such emphasis may also be found in his pastoral writings. Amongst the festal epistles, the fullest discussion of the superiority of the Scriptures seems to be that written in 367, which was mainly preserved in Coptic. Being considered as divinely inspired, the Scriptures are described there as 'fountains of salvation' (πηγαὶ τοῦ σωτηρίου). In these alone is proclaimed the doctrine of godliness (τὸ τῆς εὐσεβείας διδασκαλεῖον). The Scriptures are for him the central criteria of all teachings. When arguing with his enemies, such as Arians and Hieracas, the most usual method he used is to prove that they had gone astray from the Scriptures or they had misinterpreted the biblical messages. For this cause, he urged his congregation to follow every teaching of the Scriptures and contemplate God through them. He reminded eagerly his congregation not to listen to them carelessly.<sup>139</sup>

Responding to the request of an ill deacon,<sup>140</sup> Athanasius talks about the Scriptures, especially the Psalms, in detail in his *Epistula ad Marcellinum*. Following biblical words,

<sup>135</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, pp.183-184.

<sup>136</sup> *De Incarn.* 4 (Thomson, p.144).

<sup>137</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 4.2 (Cureton, p.33).

<sup>138</sup> For Athanasius' explanation of the relationship between knowledge and virtue, see also *Ep. Fest.* 11 (Cureton, pp.52-56; Burgess, pp.143-141; Cureton, pp.ⲛ-ⲙⲁ) and Badger, 'The New Man Created in God: Christology, Congregation and Asceticism in Athanasius of Alexandria,' pp.132-135.

<sup>139</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 39.6 (PG 26, col.1437).

<sup>140</sup> In Athanasius' *Apol. Ar.* 73 (PG 25, col.381), the name 'Marcellinus' is listed amongst the deacons of Alexandria. However, based on the use of 'a learned old man,' some scholars suggest that Marcellinus was



he told the deacon at the beginning that all Scriptures are ‘inspired by God (θεόπνευστός) and profitable for teaching (ὠφέλιμος πρὸς διδασκαλίαν).’<sup>141</sup> Although each biblical book has its own genre and feature, they are all produced by the same Holy Spirit.<sup>142</sup> Reading or reciting the Scriptures can even cast out demons and heal the suffering.<sup>143</sup> Amongst the biblical books, Athanasius values the Psalms most highly. They are distinguished from other books in that their words can ‘become like a mirror to the person singing them (τῷ ψάλλοντι αὐτοὺς), so that he might perceive himself and the emotions of his soul (τὰ τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ψυχῆς), and thus be affected.’<sup>144</sup> Just like a bridge linking the Scriptures and the readers, the Psalms can epitomise the diverse genres of the whole Bible and at the same time express different moods and situations of human existence.<sup>145</sup> Clearly, in relation to reading or reciting the Scriptures, what Athanasius sees as the most important is not intellectual knowledge, but piety of soul.

Besides study, Athanasius also encouraged others to meditate on the divine words and godly things in order to affect the soul deeply. In his eleventh festal letter, he shared his opinions on this topic at length. Urging others to imitate the saints, he portrays the faithful servants of the Lord there as those who ‘meditate (ⲙⲉⲗⲉⲧⲁⲛ) on the words of the Lord (ⲕⲉⲣⲁⲩⲁⲧⲁⲛ) when sitting in the house, when lying down or rising up, and when walking by the way.’<sup>146</sup> With faith and hope developed, they gradually become steadfast in tribulations and persevering in prayers. Being able to move to virtue in both action and thoughts, they can well please the Lord.<sup>147</sup> Supported by this model, Athanasius says in the letter plainly that constant meditation and remembrance of divine words could ‘strengthen piety towards God, and produce a love to Him.’<sup>148</sup> Of course, as other elements for contemplation of God, such meditation is for Athanasius more urgent at the time of paschal feast.<sup>149</sup>

In addition to studying the Scriptures, another important activity in the festal celebration is prayer (προσευχή). While talking about keeping the feast, Athanasius demands that when the whole church celebrated together, ‘praise (ⲕⲉⲃⲁⲗⲁⲛ) and prayer

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in a monastic setting or was himself an urban ascetic. Cf. M. J. Rondeau, ‘L’Épître à Marcellinus sur les Psaumes,’ *VC* 22 (1968):194-197; and Badger, ‘The New Man Created in God: Christology, Congregation and Asceticism in Athanasius of Alexandria,’ pp.249-250.

<sup>141</sup> *Ad Mar.* 2 (PG 27, col.12); 2 Tim. 3:16.

<sup>142</sup> *Ad Mar.* 9, 31 (PG 27, col.17-20, 41-44). The same message may also be found in *Ep. Fest.* 2 (CSCO 150, p.37) and *De Incarn.* 56 (Thomson, p.272).

<sup>143</sup> *Ad Mar.* 33 (PG 27, col.44-45).

<sup>144</sup> *Ad Mar.* 12 (PG 27, col.24).

<sup>145</sup> *Ad Mar.* 2-10 (PG 27, col.12-21). See also H. J. Sieben, ‘Athanasius über den Psalter: Analyse seines Briefes an Marcellinus,’ *Theologie und Philosophie* 48 (1973):162.

<sup>146</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 11.6 (Cureton, p.ⲙⲉⲗⲉⲧⲁⲛ).

<sup>147</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 11.6-7 (Cureton, pp.ⲙⲉⲗⲉⲧⲁⲛ-ⲕⲉⲣⲁⲩⲁⲧⲁⲛ).

<sup>148</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 11.4 (Cureton, p.56).

<sup>149</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 11.11 (Cureton, pp.ⲕⲉⲃⲁⲗⲁⲛ-ⲕⲉⲣⲁⲩⲁⲧⲁⲛ).

(καλῶς) shall ascend to the gracious and good Father.’<sup>150</sup> By doing so, the walls of every adverse power such as that of Jericho would fall down and the gift of the Holy Spirit would richly pour upon all men. Using imitative teaching, Athanasius adds, ‘The faithful and true servants of the Lord, knowing that the Lord loves the thankful, never cease to praise Him, ever giving thanks unto the Lord.’<sup>151</sup> According to Alexandrian tradition, there were four different kinds of prayer, and praise and thanksgiving were two of them.<sup>152</sup> As with other contemplative practices, for Athanasius, prayer should best be unceasing and without limit.<sup>153</sup>

However, before all these, there is a prerequisite of faith. For Athanasius, faith is not just essential in prayers, but also in understanding of the divine words. On this point, he declares expressly that without faith it is impossible to be partakers of the living bread.<sup>154</sup> Treating faith as the mother of all virtues (ΤΜΑΔΥΤΕ ΝΝΑΡΕΤΗ ΤΗΡΟΥ), he sees lack of faith as a great evil (ΟΥΝΟΘ ΜΠΕΘΟΟΥΤΕ).<sup>155</sup> In contrast, if a man have faith and divine knowledge, he is definitely righteous and his soul is always in health.<sup>156</sup> Consistently, faith (πίστις, *fides*) was in church history linked with dogma, the universally accepted knowledge of God. While comparing Greek philosophy with Christianity, Clement writes, ‘Faith (πίστις) is something superior to knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) and is its criterion (αὐτῆς κριτήριον).’<sup>157</sup> Talking about the heretical problems, Tertullian announces directly that the Creed is not only a rule of faith (*regula fidei*), but also a law of faith (*lex fidei*).<sup>158</sup> For Origen, martyrdom is actually a courageous confession for salvation (ὁμολογεῖται εἰς σωτηρίαν).<sup>159</sup> Undoubtedly, Athanasius’ faith does also include some doctrinal elements. Whether in his apologetic or pastoral writings, he writes of his theological position everywhere without hesitation.

## b) Pure Soul (καθαρά ψυχή)

As discussed in the previous chapter, in Athanasius’ soteriology, Christians should purify their souls by casting off all human desires and putting off every stain of sin. These requirements are more concretely probed in his pastoral works. Though clearly

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 14.5 (Cureton, p.30).

<sup>152</sup> As listed by Origen, the four different kinds of prayer are supplication (δέησις), adoration (προσευχή), intercession (ἐντευξις) and thanksgiving (εὐχαριστία). Cf. Origen, *De Oratione* 14.2 (GCS 3, p.331).

<sup>153</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 11.11 (Cureton, p.۱۱). For discussion of unceasing prayer, see Chapter Three part B.1.a and Ramsey, *Beginning to Read the Fathers*, chap.9.

<sup>154</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 7.7 (Cureton, p.۷).

<sup>155</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 2 (CSCO 150, p.39).

<sup>156</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 7.8 (Cureton, pp.۷-۸).

<sup>157</sup> Clement, *Stromata* 2.4.15 (GCS 15, p.120).

<sup>158</sup> Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* 14 (Bindley, p.50).

<sup>159</sup> Origen, *Exhortatio ad Martyrium* 5 (GCS 2, p.7).

influenced by Greek philosophy, Athanasius' asceticism was chiefly inherited from the Christian tradition. As A. Pettersen shows, he saw all creations of God, including the human body, as good. Instead of a vehicle for the punishment and education of the soul, the body is an instrument for proper communication of the soul and the world, and hence is not evil.<sup>160</sup> He expresses in the fragment *De Mor. Val.* that both human soul and body are one human being and have been made by God in the beginning.<sup>161</sup> Although the soul is not composed of bodily members, yet it possesses the significance of the members' actions.<sup>162</sup> Against the suggestion of overmuch vigil for the reason of watchfulness, echoing the idea in *C. Gent.*, Athanasius argues that the sleep of the soul is different from that of the body. While the body (τό σῶμα) is lying still on earth, the soul (ἡ ψυχή) can travel through outer places (τὰ ἔξω τῶν τόπων διέρχεται) and fly up from earth to the heaven (ἀπὸ γῆς εἰς οὐρανοὺς ἀνίπταται).<sup>163</sup> Although the health or sickness of the soul and the body are independent of each other, they are not opposite. Things that ail the body are not necessarily healthy for the soul, and vice versa.<sup>164</sup> So the purpose of ascetic practices is not to negate the body, but to prepare the soul for God by neglecting all the worldly attractions. For this reason, he writes when talking about fasting, 'For not only does such a fast as this obtain pardon for souls, but being kept holy, it prepares the saints, and raises them above the earth.'<sup>165</sup> Again, such anthropology is basically in accordance with the church tradition. As K. J. Torjesen observes, long before Athanasius, Irenaeus had already affirmed that both soul and body were created by the one God the Father and were together in the image of God. Even in the thought of Origen, the body is not a cause of sin; rather, it was created as a remedy for sin.<sup>166</sup>

Steadily revealed in Athanasius' doctrinal and pastoral writings, what are truly opposite are not body and soul, but earthly desires and godly passions. While earthly desires allure believers to the world through the body, godly passions pull them to divine reality in a reverse direction through the soul. So, Athanasius relates the two together and says, 'Now our life, my brethren, truly consists in our denying all bodily things (καταλείπειν τὰ σωματικά), and continuing steadfast in those only of our Saviour (ἡμεῖς μόνον ἐκείνου).'<sup>167</sup> Only after rejecting all external distractions and evil thoughts can one's soul be purified, and hence

<sup>160</sup> Pettersen, *Athanasius and the Human Body*, p.112.

<sup>161</sup> *De Mor. Val.* 3 (OCA 117, p.6).

<sup>162</sup> Here, Athanasius says, 'The soul's progress toward virtue is the feet (πόδες), the accuracy of its reflections is the hands (χεῖρες), the clear-sighted mind is the eye (ὀφθαλμός), and the discrimination of thoughts is the tongue (γλῶσσα) itself.' *De Mor. Val.* 4 (OCA 117, p.6).

<sup>163</sup> *De Mor. Val.* 5-6 (OCA 117, pp.6-7); *C. Gent.* 31, 33 (Thomson, p.86, 90).

<sup>164</sup> *De Mor. Val.* 7 (OCA 117, p.7).

<sup>165</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 1.5 (Cureton, p.16).

<sup>166</sup> K. J. Torjesen, 'Body,' *EEChr* 1:186. For discussions of the trichotomous anthropology of Origen, see Crouzel, *Origen*, pp.87-92.

<sup>167</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 5.4 (Cureton, p.38).

behold God as in a mirror and bring forth fruit.<sup>168</sup> As paschal feast is a time for intensive contemplation of God, such purification of the soul is especially essential before and during the festival. On this account, Athanasius wrote to his congregation in a festal letter, ‘Let us cleanse our hands, let us purify the body. Let us keep our whole mind from guile; not giving up ourselves to excess, and to lusts, but occupying ourselves entirely with our Lord, and with divine doctrines; so that, being altogether pure (ἁγῆς), we may be able to partake of the Word.’<sup>169</sup>

Besides study of the Scriptures, meditation of the divine reality and prayer, the ascetic disciplines Athanasius recommended in his festal letters also included fasting,<sup>170</sup> sexual abstinence<sup>171</sup> and charitable acts for the paupers, strangers and enemies.<sup>172</sup> In other words, renunciation of all worldly needs covering food, sex and wealth was requested of the entire congregation. Again, all these requirements were not originated by Athanasius. At a very early stage of Christianity, believers in many areas had already fasted twice a week.<sup>173</sup> Certainly, in the time of Dionysius, fasting in the duration of Lent had already been promoted in the Alexandrian church.<sup>174</sup> It seems that the practice of sexual abstinence before certain religious rituals was a clear message from the Old Testament.<sup>175</sup> The fathers strengthened this kind of temperance in their support for virginity.<sup>176</sup> Both Clement and Origen consider the purpose of married sex as procreation of children (τέκνων σπορά) and not pleasure (ἡδονή).<sup>177</sup> Concerning charity, the *Didache* propounds that hospitality is a duty of all Christians.<sup>178</sup> Cyprian even wrote a whole treatise on almsgiving and exhorted every believer to help the needy.<sup>179</sup>

Athanasius’ Lenten fast lasted for forty days, which was intensified during the Holy Week.<sup>180</sup> Precisely how these fasts took place is not known; the bishop suggested his congregation should participate ‘in fasts (ἑσθῆς) and vigils (ἡγίασμα), as each one is able

<sup>168</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 14.4 (Cureton, p.29).

<sup>169</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 5.5 (Cureton, p.40). See also *Ep. Fest.* 1.7, 14.5 (Cureton, p.17, 31).

<sup>170</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 1.4-7, 10, 3.5, 4.2, 5.1, 4, 6.12-13, 7.11, 12.1, 14.5-6, 19.8-9, 24.8 (Cureton, pp.15-17, 19, αΔ, 33, 36, 39, α, μα, μα-αδ, 31, αω, 25); *Ep. Fest.* 25, 42 (CSCO 150, pp.43-44, 66).

<sup>171</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 6.12 (Cureton, p.α).

<sup>172</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 1.11, 3.5, 4.3 (Cureton, p.19, αΔ-Δ, 34); *Ep. Fest.* 25, 26, 39, 42 (CSCO 150, p.43, 45, 21, 66).

<sup>173</sup> In order to distinguish themselves from the Jews, who fasted on Monday and Thursday, early Christians fasted on every Wednesday and Friday. Cf. *Didache* 8 (Lightfoot & Harmer, p.258).

<sup>174</sup> Dionysius, *Epistula ad Basilidem* (Feltoe, pp.100-102).

<sup>175</sup> Exo. 19:15; 1 Sam. 21:4-5.

<sup>176</sup> For the opinions of the fathers on this subject, see P. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York, 1988), part 1.

<sup>177</sup> Clement, *Paedagogus* 2.4.10 (GCS 12, p.96); Origen, *Homiliae in Genesim* 5.4 (PG 12, col.191-192).

<sup>178</sup> *Didache* 12-13 (Lightfoot & Harmer, pp.264-266).

<sup>179</sup> Cyprian, *De Opere et Eleemosynis* (CSEL 3.1, pp.373-394).

<sup>180</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 6.13, 7.11, 10.12, 11.15, 13.8, 14.6, 19.9-10 (Cureton, p.α, μα, 52, αδ, αλ, 31, αω).







aid the needy virgins and hence attracted them to remain loyally in his church.<sup>192</sup> However, one should note here that almsgiving is an important teaching of the Scriptures, and was discussed and promoted by the fathers repeatedly in early church history.<sup>193</sup> Instead of for political goals, it is much more likely that Athanasius encouraged almsgiving for religious reasons.

### c) Virtuous Life (καλός βίος)

Certainly, the emphasis on virtues was not initiated by Athanasius. Long before him, the Greek philosophers, including Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, had already talked about good and virtue. In the Old Testament, all judges and kings are valued as good or bad depending on their deeds in the standard of God. As F. Cayre observes, a moral teaching strongly tinged with asceticism is distributed in the *Apostolic Fathers*.<sup>194</sup> According to the categorisation of J. Quasten, Tertullian has at least sixteen treatises on disciplinary and moral matters.<sup>195</sup> Besides, in the third book of Cyprian's *Ad Quirinum*, one hundred and twenty theses on Christian virtues are included.<sup>196</sup> Depending on the philosophical or theological background, the definition of virtue seems to have been varying throughout the centuries. In spite of this, since all the fathers have a deep reverence for authority and tradition as B. Ramsey says, the fundamental outline of virtue remains unchanged in the church.<sup>197</sup>

Negatively, virtuous life implies casting off all worldly desires, which is actualised in the renunciation of food, sex and wealth discussed above. Positively, it comprises cleansing the soul with the virtue according to Christ. While some activities such as fast and vigil belong solely to self-abnegation or solely to merit for others, many others such as almsgiving and hospitality may be counted as both. In Athanasius' anthropology, men are mortal by nature. It is the partaking of the divine Word through the added grace that causes them to be able to pursue good and hence escape from the natural corruption. Although this gracious gift was lost in the fall, the incarnate Christ eventually renewed it. Since the Son is the active goodness, pursuit of good and imitation of His virtuous deeds are inseparable. So, Athanasius told his followers directly, 'Now we are clothed with Him when we love virtue (ῥησιν).'<sup>198</sup> In his pastoral writings, he asked his

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<sup>192</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, p.191.

<sup>193</sup> Prov. 3:9; Eccle. 11:1; Lk. 6:38; 2 Cor. 8:6-15; Gal. 2:10; 1 Tim. 6:18; Heb. 13:16; *Didache* 12.2 (Lightfoot & Harmer, p.264); *Clementis Epistula II* 16.4 (Lightfoot & Harmer, p.122); *Polycarpi Epistula ad Philippenses* 10.2 (Lightfoot & Harmer, p.216); Tertullian, *Apologeticus* 39 (PL 1, col.532-534); and Cyprian, *De Opere et Eleemosynis* (CSEL 3.1, pp.373-394).

<sup>194</sup> Cayre, *Manual of Patrology*, vol.1, p.33.

<sup>195</sup> Quasten, *Patrology*, vol.2, pp.290-317.

<sup>196</sup> Cyprian, *Ad Quirinum (Testimoniorum III)* 3 (CSEL 3.1, pp.108-184).

<sup>197</sup> Ramsey, *Beginning to Read the Fathers*, p.15.

<sup>198</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 4.3 (Cureton, p.34).

congregation eagerly everywhere ‘never to forget the noble acts of God, nor to depart from the practice of virtue (ܠܠܗܘܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ)!’<sup>199</sup> In addition to human corruptibility, he has provided three more reasons for the practice of virtue in his festal letters. Firstly, it can please God. Just like sacrifices, virtue is something to be offered to the Lord.<sup>200</sup> Besides, being a commandment from the Saviour, it is the duty of every believer.<sup>201</sup> Last, as stated before, Athanasius sees earthly desires and godly passions as two opposite forces acting on Christians. The growth of one denotes decline of the other. So, he exhorted his followers to be ‘burning like a flame.’<sup>202</sup> With an ardent spirit, believers may destroy all carnal sin and draw near to God. In contrast, departure from virtue will give place for the entrance of the unclean spirit.<sup>203</sup> Amongst the three, it appears that the third one is most strongly emphasised. As a major requirement for spiritual advancement, virtuous life can help in purifying one’s soul and directing Christians to divine knowledge.

Virtues are for Athanasius obedient actions matching the divine knowledge one gains through contemplation. So, the content of virtues is mainly extracted from the major sources of contemplation. That involves particularly the Scriptures, the model of the saints, and the direct revelation of God. In the Scriptures, many different commandments and advice may be found. They include of course the virtues we have listed above, such as fasting, vigil, prayer, almsgiving and hospitality. As the teachings of the Scriptures are numerous, the possible virtues are infinite. Athanasius has not made any comprehensive list about these virtues. He just pointed out some of them circumstantially. It seems that even he himself could not define clearly how many such virtues a Christian should persevere with. He just asked his congregation to repent with him frequently on the virtuous acts they have neglected, ‘whatever it may be.’<sup>204</sup> It appears that Athanasius’ list of virtuous conduct was expanding all the time. Nevertheless, above all, following the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 22:37-40, Athanasius insists that loving God and the neighbour is the first virtue every believer needed.<sup>205</sup>

Concerning the model of the saints, following his Christological themes, Athanasius regards the deeds of Jesus as a heavenly model of godly life that God has

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<sup>199</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 5.5 (Cureton, p.39).

<sup>200</sup> For example, Athanasius exhorted his followers, ‘Let us offer to the Lord every virtue.’ *Ep. Fest.* 5.4 (Cureton, p.38).

<sup>201</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 24.2 (Cureton, p.21).

<sup>202</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 14.3 (Cureton, p.28).

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>204</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 5.5 (Cureton, p.40).

<sup>205</sup> For example, Athanasius said, ‘Let us remember the poor, and not forget kindness to strangers; above all, let us love God with all our soul, and might, and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves.’ *Ep. Fest.* 1.11 (Cureton, p.19). See also *Ep. Fest.* 2 (CSCO 150, p.42).

given to fallen men. So, he urges in his festal letters the congregation everywhere to imitate Jesus and follow His teachings. Here, all Christians are required to be like the Lord in every aspect, including for example eating the paschal feast and facing persecutions.<sup>206</sup> He calls those people who fashion themselves like this ‘partakers of Christ (ܡܫܬܬܝܬܝܢ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ), and imitators of apostolic conversation (ܡܫܬܬܝܬܝܢ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ)’.<sup>207</sup> In addition to imitation of Jesus, Athanasius also requested his followers to imitate the saints. Since the saints had become the mirror images of Christ through their disciplines, they were imitable as well.<sup>208</sup> These imitable saints include angels, righteous figures of the Scriptures like Moses, and virtuous Christians like Antony. For example, he urged the female virgins to imitate Mary,<sup>209</sup> and the Pachomian monks to imitate Theodore.<sup>210</sup> Again, the virtues deducible from the model of the saints are numberless. From the exemplar of Paul, he boosts suffering for God.<sup>211</sup> Based on the pattern of Elijah, Elisha and other prophets, he promotes solitary and virtuous lifestyle.<sup>212</sup> Amongst his expositions on the attributes of the saints, the most comprehensive and representative one is that in *Ep. Fest.* 7. Here, three imitable qualities may be observed. Firstly, the saints are perfectly virtuous. Athanasius characterised them as ‘pure and without spot’ (ܡܫܬܬܝܬܝܢ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ). Following that, they are truly pure in soul. Having become dead to the world, they renounce any earthly merchandise and are willing to be crucified with Christ. Finally, they concentrate on the contemplation of God. As they are dead to the world, they dwell as in heaven and contemplate only spiritual things.<sup>213</sup> Obviously, this is actually the realisation of Athanasius’ formula: contemplating God with a pure soul through virtuous life. Walking on the way to God is itself the key virtue modelled by the saints.

Regarding the last source of contemplation, the most important virtue is for Athanasius the obedience of the timely calling from God. On this subject, he wrote immediately after his ordination as the archbishop of Alexandria, ‘For discerning the

<sup>206</sup> Eating paschal feast (*Ep. Fest.* 2: CSCO 150, p.41; *Ep. Fest.* 14.5: Cureton, p.31); facing persecutions (*Ep. Fest.* 10.5: Burgess, p.144). Concerning Athanasius’ teachings about our imitation of Christ, see also Norman, ‘Deification: The Content of Athanasian Soteriology,’ pp.110-122.

<sup>207</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 24.5 (Cureton, p.23).

<sup>208</sup> On this point, Athanasius’ *Apol. Fuga* has provided a very good illustration. The timely flight and martyrdom were first demonstrated by the Lord (*Apol. Fuga* 12-15: PG 25, col.660-664), and then followed by the saints (*Apol. Fuga* 16-21: PG 25, col.664-672). Imitating them, Athanasius fled from the enemy persecution.

<sup>209</sup> *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 10-21 (CSCO 150, pp.77-83).

<sup>210</sup> *Ad Ors. II* (PG 26, col.977-980).

<sup>211</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 7.1 (Cureton, p.1).

<sup>212</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 2 (CSCO 150, p.37).

<sup>213</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 7.3 (Cureton, pp.1-2). In another letter, Athanasius declares similarly that the saints ‘being strong in faith, and understanding the word, do not faint under trials.’ *Ep. Fest.* 19.7 (Cureton, p.12).

time (وَصْر) is one of the duties most urgent on us, for the practice of virtue.<sup>214</sup> From the cause of such calling, he prompted people to keep the paschal feast. Precisely how Athanasius conceived the confirmation of timely vocation is not clear. According to his descriptions of the saints in *Apol. Fuga*, a calling is most probably verified by two criteria: internal inspiration and external environment.<sup>215</sup> In any case, as discussed before, obedience to the divine call is consistently regarded as a higher virtue than others.<sup>216</sup> Besides the call to participate in the spiritual warfare against the devil,<sup>217</sup> for Athanasius, obedience to God can even include the call to flee (φεύγειν) and to martyrdom (μαρτυρεῖν). In an apologetic document written during his third exile, he also used this reason to explain his flight.<sup>218</sup>

Concerning the moral teachings of Athanasius, the *Fra. Cop.* is typical. After a series of explorations on miscellaneous ethical topics such as swearing, the author moves immediately to his ideal on progressive spiritual advancement of Christian life. Using the model of Lot's ascent onto a mountain, he challenges the readers to take up ascetic life step by step. Here, Lot's ascent from Sodom to a mountain peak in Genesis 19 symbolises the religious progress of a man. His life in Sodom represents worldly lifestyle with abundant feasting. While his flight into Segor denotes advancement from great feasts to smaller ones, the ascent to the top of a mountain signifies participation in ascetic life as a monk or a virgin after a period of moderate discipline. After another series of biblical teachings on daily life such as marital sex and wine drinking, he urges the readers to prepare and purify themselves for God using eschatological reasons. To explain the underlying reasons for all the virtuous requirements, the author then makes a brief review of the gracious salvation of Christ. As a response to the grace of God, Athanasius finally exhorts the recipients to live a victorious life like that of the martyrs.<sup>219</sup> All the things are merged together. However, two points are especially noteworthy. Apart from the Scriptures and the model of the saints, theology, especially soteriology, is the foundation of all moral teachings. Besides, martyrdom and its substitute, asceticism, are strongly recommended. On the way to God, ascetic practices, which is equivalent to virtues, progressively increase in hardness.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 1.1 (Cureton, p.12).

<sup>215</sup> Internal inspiration (the example of Jesus in *Apol. Fuga* 15: PG 25, col.664); external environment (the examples of the martyrs in *Apol. Fuga* 22: PG 25, col.672-673).

<sup>216</sup> Cf. *Ep. Fest.* 1 (Cureton, pp.12-19).

<sup>217</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 1.3 (Cureton, p.14).

<sup>218</sup> *Apol. Fuga* 22 (PG 25, col.672-673).

<sup>219</sup> *Fra. Cop.* 1-12 (CSCO 150, pp.121-129).

<sup>220</sup> In *Ep. Fest.* 29 (CSCO 150, p.52), Athanasius claims directly, 'Afflictions, trials, and persecutions are tests and trainings for the saints.' This echoes the exhortation of the Council of Sardica to the Church of Alexandria, 'Wherefore even though they still recklessly assail you, let your tribulation (θλίψις) be unto you for joy. For such afflictions (παθήματα) are a sort of martyrdom (μαρτυρίου), and such confessions and

## C. Athanasius' Specific Teachings to Particular Groups

Corresponding to the needs of people with different spiritual progress, Athanasius gave them specific practical instructions so that they might all walk on the way to God successfully. Although these teachings are apparently different, as we will see, they are all consistent with his general views on asceticism, which were in turn developed from his spirituality and theology.

### 1. Teachings to Female Virgins

In the early church, 'virginity' was expressed by several Greek words; different writers employed them differently.<sup>221</sup> The one that Athanasius used most is παρθενία, with its cognate word ἄρθενοι for 'virgins.' Similar to other fathers, he applies these terms to the sexual renunciation of both sexes, though mainly of women. As an exhortation to virginity, he cited Elijah, Elisha, Jeremiah and John the Baptist as biblical examples of virgins.<sup>222</sup> Different from other deeds, virginity is for him an additional discipline above the law and thus optional. While ordinary virtues are obligatory and performed in accordance with the law, the neglect of which is to be condemned, Athanasius stresses, 'Virginity has ascended higher and has no law (ΕΜΝΤCΝΟΜΟC).' <sup>223</sup> So, the purpose of keeping virginity is not to avoid accusation, but to have a better union with Christ<sup>224</sup> and consequently gain an extra bonus, the crown of purity in heaven (ΠΕΚΛΟΜ ΜΠΕΤΒΒΟ ΞΝΜΠΗΥΕ).<sup>225</sup> Because of this, he emphasises that the measure of virginity's virtue should be according to free will and desire (ΟΥΠΡΟΞΔΙΡΕCΙC ΜΝΟΥΟΥΩΩ).<sup>226</sup>

Basically, Athanasius' supportive attitude to virginity has two theological foundations. Firstly, having no distraction from the family, virgins can have a purer soul for divine contemplation. Secondly, virginity is a virtue demonstrated by the angels, who according to Matthew 22:30 neither marry nor are given in marriage. Though trying to accept different types of ascetic pattern and eliminate discrimination, Athanasius insists that virginity is superior. In a Coptic letter to the virgins, he declares plainly, 'Marriage is good, but it is better if you are a virgin' (ΝΑΝΟΥΠΞΙCΞΙΜΕ ΜΕΝ, ΟΥΞΟΥΟ ΔΕΠΕ

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tortures as yours will not be without their reward, but you shall receive the prize (τὰ ἔπαθλα) from God.' *Apol. Ar.* 38 (PG 25, col.316).

<sup>221</sup> These words include παρθενία, εὐνουχία, ἐγκράτεια, ἀγαμία and ἀγνεία. Cf. Tibiletti, 'Virgin—Virginity—Velatio,' 2:871.

<sup>222</sup> *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 7 (CSCO 150, p.76). Brakke says that Athanasius restricted the title 'virgin' to ascetic women only. Cf. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, p.9. However, as seen from our quotation, Brakke's statement is not true.

<sup>223</sup> *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 2 (CSCO 150, p.73).

<sup>224</sup> *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 3 (CSCO 150, p.74).

<sup>225</sup> *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 23 (CSCO 150, p.84).

<sup>226</sup> *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 27 (CSCO 150, p.86).



ΕΚΩΔΗΡΠΑΡΘΕΝΟC).<sup>227</sup> In his pastoral letters, he repeated once and once again the parable of fruiting. For him, marriage (ὁ γάμος) is moderate and ordinary, and can only bring forth thirtyfold of fruit (καρπὸν τῶν τριάκοντα). As virginity (ἡ παρθενία) is angelic and insuperable, it can grow perfect fruit hundredfold (τὸν τέλειον καρπὸν τὴν ἑκατοντάδα).<sup>228</sup> Concerning the interrelation of virgins and married believers, Athanasius comments, 'Virginity leads and walks in front, as she is accustomed, with great boldness, and they all will be a single chorus (ΟΥΧΟΡΟΣ ΝΟΥΩΤ) and a single symphony (ΟΥCΥΜΦΩΝΙΑ ΝΟΥΩΤ) in the faith.'<sup>229</sup> Although virgins are better and greater, all Christians are still walking on the same spiritual way in harmony.

It seems that this high valuation of virginity was deeply rooted in the mind of Athanasius at a very early stage. In *De Incarnatione*, one of his earliest works, he challenges, 'What man then, after his death or even while he was still alive, taught about virginity and did not think that it was impossible (ἀδύνατον) for this virtue to exist among men?'<sup>230</sup> While rejecting the existence of real virgins in pagan religions, like Justin Martyr, Athanasius regards virginity as a powerful proof of the truth of Christianity.<sup>231</sup> In a letter to the virgins, he emphasises repeatedly, 'Virginity surpasses human nature, for it is the image of angelic purity (ΘΕΙΚΩΝ ΜΠΤΒΟ ΝΤΜΝΤΑΓΓΕΛΟC).'<sup>232</sup> Because of this, virginity is primarily very difficult, or even impossible, to achieve by human effort. It is the incarnation of Christ through taking flesh from a virgin that has made this virtue possible and easy.<sup>233</sup>

Regarding the superiority of virginity, over one century earlier, Tertullian had already treated virgins as brides of Christ (*nuptae Christi*) and members in the angelic family (*familia angelica*). He argued that the apostle Paul merely 'permits' (*permittente*) marrying, but 'prefers' (*praeferente*) abstinence.<sup>234</sup> Later, Cyprian even stated explicitly that virginity is a superior way of life to marriage.<sup>235</sup> In all probability, Athanasius' analogy of a chorus was borrowed from Methodius' statement: 'The order and holy choir (χορός) of virgins will be the first (πρῶτος) to follow in His [Lord's] train as it were into a

<sup>227</sup> *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 19 (CSCO 150, p.81). In the same passage, Athanasius also says, 'Therefore, marriage is not rejected, and moreover virginity is greater with God.'

<sup>228</sup> *Ad Amun* (PG 26, col.1173). See also *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 20 (CSCO 150, p.82) and *Ep. Fest.* 10.4 (Cureton, p.ϣ; Burgess, p.146).

<sup>229</sup> *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 21 (CSCO 150, p.83).

<sup>230</sup> *De Incarn.* 51 (Thomson, p.262). See also *De Incarn.* 48 (Thomson, p.254) and *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 4-8 (CSCO 150, pp.74-76).

<sup>231</sup> *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 4-8 (CSCO 150, pp.74-76); Justin, *I Apology* 15 (PTS 38, pp.54-55).

<sup>232</sup> *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 19 (CSCO 150, p.81).

<sup>233</sup> *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 8 (CSCO 150, p.76).

<sup>234</sup> Tertullian, *De Virginibus Velandis* 16 (PL 2, col.910-911); *Ad Uxorem* 1.3 (PL 1, col.1390-1391).

<sup>235</sup> Cyprian, *De Habitu Virginum* 23 (CSEL 3.1, pp.203-204); *De Mortalitate* 26 (CSEL 3.1, pp.313-314).

bridal chamber (νυμφῶνα), into the repose of the new ages.’<sup>236</sup> As listed by M. A. Schatkin, during the fourth and fifth centuries, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, Jerome, Augustine and Ambrose all wrote treatises on the subject of virginity.<sup>237</sup> It seems that at the time of Athanasius, the superiority of virginity had already been widely recognised, or was being settled, in the Catholic Church.<sup>238</sup>

In addition to Athanasius’ own writings, three collections of ‘canons’ concerning the virgins in fourth-century Egypt, namely *Canones Hippolyti*,<sup>239</sup> *Canones Basilii*<sup>240</sup> and *Canones Athanasii*,<sup>241</sup> are most frequently referred to.<sup>242</sup> Besides, *Apophthegmata Patrum* and several ancient papyri<sup>243</sup> are also valuable resources for our study of this subject. By using these materials, S. Elm argues that figures like Pachomius, Athanasius and Basil were actually not monastic innovators, but reformers only. They just replaced already existing organisational models of ascetic life with others. Early in the third century, or even earlier, women in Egypt had already pursued their ascetic life within their own family or in community with others. Although some of them seem to have followed the men and withdrawn into the desert, information about this is diverse and ambiguous.<sup>244</sup> Certainly, the major objects of Athanasius’ virginal treatises were the virgins living in or near the cities, including both girls living at home with parents and in communities with other virgins.<sup>245</sup> Since modern studies of these urban Egyptian virgins already exist, only some important and relevant points are discussed here.<sup>246</sup>

<sup>236</sup> Methodius, *Convivium Decem Virginum* 7.3 (SC 95, p.186).

<sup>237</sup> M. A. Schatkin, ‘Virgins,’ *EEChr* 2:1166.

<sup>238</sup> For discussions of the non-Christian background and Christian attitude to marriage before Athanasius, see M. F. Wahba, ‘The Doctrine of Sanctification in Relation to Marriage according to St. Athanasius,’ Ph.D. diss. (University of Ottawa, 1993), chap.1-2.

<sup>239</sup> These canons are usually called the *Pseudo-Hippolytan Canons* and were revised from the *Apostolic Tradition*. The original Greek was completely lost, only an Arabic and an Ethiopic version are extant.

<sup>240</sup> These canons are usually called the *Pseudo-Basilian Canons* and have only very little relation with the Cappadocian bishop. The original Greek was completely lost, only an Arabic version and some Coptic fragments are extant.

<sup>241</sup> These canons are usually called the *Pseudo-Athanasian Canons* and were compiled by an unknown Egyptian author. The original Greek was completely lost, only an Arabic version and some Coptic fragments are extant.

<sup>242</sup> Both S. Elm and C. M. Badger use them to reconstruct the picture of fourth-century virginal life. Cf. S. Elm, ‘The Organization and Institutions of Female Asceticism in Fourth-Century Cappadocia and Egypt,’ D.Phil. thesis (Oxford, 1987), pp.110-115; and Badger, ‘The New Man Created in God: Christology, Congregation and Asceticism in Athanasius of Alexandria,’ pp.179-181.

<sup>243</sup> For discussion of these papyri, see S. Elm, ‘*Virgins of God*’: *The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity*, Oxford Classical Monographs (Oxford, 1994), pp.234-252.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, chap.7-8.

<sup>245</sup> Concerning the objects of Athanasius’ virginal treatises, see Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, pp.25-28.

<sup>246</sup> For modern studies of this subject, see Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, chap.13; and Elm, ‘*Virgins of God*’: *The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity*, part 2.

First of all, one should note that virgins in Athanasius' time seem to have come from various social classes. Amongst them, many were indigent. In order to relieve the family from dowry payments and other expenses, while regarding infant exposure as sinful, some poor parents dedicated their unwanted girl babies to the church.<sup>247</sup> Athanasius himself also acknowledged the existence of virgins who were oppressed by 'poverty' (ῥηλεσμία) and reminded them to stand fast against earthly attractions.<sup>248</sup> However, at the same time, there were wealthy women like Melania and Olympias listed amongst the virgins.<sup>249</sup> When Melania went to Nitria, she brought with her a great silver casket filled with three hundred pounds of silver (τριακοσίων λιτρῶν ἀργυρίου).<sup>250</sup> To a convent recruited from her own dependants, Olympias contributed ten thousand pounds of gold (χρυσίου λίτρας μυρίας) and twenty thousand pounds of silver (ἀργυρίου λίτρας δισμυρίας).<sup>251</sup> Women seem to have taken an active part in the religious life of the imperial period. The intellectual and religious achievements of women become more conspicuous in the fourth century. For economic reasons, needy virgins were often gathered together, supported and headed by the rich and formed pious communities. Most of these communities were less than a hundred in number, but Olympias' convent was able to install 250 virgins.<sup>252</sup>

On top of economic need, the most important reason for people's dedication as virgins seems to be still religious. C. Tibiletti suggests that virginity had a biblical motivation from Mathew 19:12 and was one of the realities characteristic of the kingdom of God.<sup>253</sup> In the *Canones Athanasii*, every house of Christians is required to have a virgin, 'for the salvation of the whole house is this one virgin.'<sup>254</sup> Parents have to observe every movement of their daughters. If a girl is obedient, loved to fast and her eyes are steadfast, she 'is worthy of holiness' and 'shall be appointed for the habit (σχήμα).'<sup>255</sup> For

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<sup>247</sup> Cf. J. Boswell, 'Expositio and Oblatio: The Abandonment of Children and the Ancient and Medieval Family,' *American Historical Review* 89 (1984):10-33; *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (New York, 1988), part 1; and C. Patterson, "'Not Worth the Rearing": The Causes of Infant Exposure in Ancient Greece,' *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 115 (1985):103-123.

<sup>248</sup> *Ad Virgin. Syr.* 24 (*Mus* 41, p.184).

<sup>249</sup> As Elm says, in late antiquity, women were regarded as *πάρθενοι* 'not because of their physical condition but because of their way of life.' Elm, *'Virgins of God': The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity*, p.228. Although Melania and Olympias were actually widows, they are frequently listed as virgins. The *Vita Olympiadis* even suggests that Olympias died as an undefiled virgin. Cf. *Vita Olympiadis* 2 (Delehay, p.411).

<sup>250</sup> Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* 10 (Butler, 2:30).

<sup>251</sup> *Vita Olympiadis* 5, 7 (Delehay, p.413, 415).

<sup>252</sup> *Vita Olympiadis* 6 (Delehay, p.414).

<sup>253</sup> C. Tibiletti, 'Virgin—Virginity—Velatio,' *EEChu* 2:871.

<sup>254</sup> *Can. Ath.* 98 (Riedel & Crum, p.62).

<sup>255</sup> *Can. Ath.* 97-98 (Riedel & Crum, pp.62-63). The 'habit' here means the dress and outward conduct of a nun.

rich women without daughters, the *Canones* request them to select one of her maids as a virgin. Once appointed, this girl should no longer be treated as a slave, but like a daughter.<sup>256</sup> Apparently, it was the parents, or the masters, who decided the dedication of a virgin. However, one should note that the position of the *Canones Basilii* is exactly opposite on this point. While suggesting that a certain degree of censure should be given to a virgin who broke her promise, the *Canones* emphasises that the virginal decision had to be made with one's own will after careful consideration and forbids the parents to dress their daughter 'in the garment of a virgin.'<sup>257</sup> Ironically, it is the latter which shows greater consistency with the ascetic teachings of Athanasius than the former, the *Canones Athanasii*.

To become a virgin, making certain vow was the only requirement. The *Canones Hippolyti* specifies that virgins did not need to be consecrated by the laying on of hands. Rather, simple proclamation was sufficient.<sup>258</sup> Both the *Canones Basilii* and the *Canones Athanasii* speak of a 'vow' (ΕΠΗΤ).<sup>259</sup> We have no details about the vow; it seems that it was performed differently in various areas. According to Athanasius' own writings, the virginal vow in fourth-century Egypt was in written form.<sup>260</sup> Apparently, it was public and formal as the bishop appealed to it repeatedly in his exhortation to the virgins.<sup>261</sup> Since Egyptian women customarily married in an early age, most of the vows were probably made when the girls were still in adolescence.<sup>262</sup> In church history, they were frequently called 'brides of Christ' after the dedication as virgins.<sup>263</sup>

As the soteriological principles are the same, Athanasius' ascetic practices for the virgins are basically very similar to that of general congregation, especially that during the paschal period. Besides renunciation of sex in maintaining virginity, the virgins were also required to contemplate God through constant studying of the Scriptures<sup>264</sup> and silent

<sup>256</sup> *Can. Ath.* 103-104 (Riedel & Crum, pp.66-67).

<sup>257</sup> *Canones Basilii* 36 (Riedel, p.254).

<sup>258</sup> *Canones Hippolyti* 7 (PO 31.2, pp.358-361). Although the virgins addressed here were the celibate sub-deacons and lectors, it is clearly applicable to the female virgins.

<sup>259</sup> *Canones Basilii* 5, 36 (Riedel, p.239, 256-257); *Can. Ath.* 97 (Riedel & Crum, p.62).

<sup>260</sup> Athanasius wrote to the virgins, 'Rejoicing, you offered [yourself] and wrote (ⲁⲃⲁ) that you would strive.' *Ad Virgin. Syr.* 23 (*Mus* 41, p.183).

<sup>261</sup> *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 1, 6, 19, 30, 32-33 (CSCO 150, p.73, 76, 81, 88, 89).

<sup>262</sup> R. S. Bagnall estimated that 70% of Egyptian women married by 20 and 90% by 24. Cf. R. S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, 1993), p.189. See also B. D. Shaw, 'The Age of Roman Girls at Marriage: Some Reconsiderations,' *Journal of Roman Studies* 77 (1987):30-46.

<sup>263</sup> For development of this title, see Ramsey, *Beginning to Read the Fathers*, pp.142-143.

<sup>264</sup> *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 13-14, 35 (CSCO 150, pp.78-79, 90); *Ad Virgin. Syr.* 10 (*Mus* 41, p.175); *Ser. Virgin.* 8-9 (*Mus* 40, pp.212-213). Like the instructions to laymen, Athanasius wrote to the virgins, 'The Holy Scriptures are sufficient for us, instructing us so that we might have a perfect goal, the forms of the heavenly way of life.' *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 35 (CSCO 150, p.90). Also, he put his emphasis on the Book of Psalms. Cf. *Ser. Virgin.* 8, 11 (*Mus* 40, p.212, 214).



prayer.<sup>265</sup> As the brides of Christ, they were all encouraged to cling undividedly to and obey their Bridegroom, speak with Him daily, or even hourly, with their zeal and vow.<sup>266</sup> Amongst Athanasius' virginal teachings, purity is the most dominant subject. Along with keeping one's soul pure, every virgin was also demanded to have a holy body.<sup>267</sup> In order to achieve this purity, they were all enjoined to keep away from worldly desires.<sup>268</sup> All types of luxury, whether in clothing, sleeping, bathing, eating and drinking, should be relinquished.<sup>269</sup> Moreover, regular fasting and vigil were also needed.<sup>270</sup> Although being asked to leave her home or convent as little as possible,<sup>271</sup> each virgin was obligated to show virtue to others, especially to the poor.<sup>272</sup> Following the message in Mathew 23:23, Athanasius warned the virgins that ascetic practices would be totally useless if one had no virtue like justice and mercy.<sup>273</sup>

Repeating the ascending model in doctrinal writings, Athanasius discourses also about the way to heaven and the hindering of the devil in his virginal treatises. Because of envy, the adversary would sow human thought into the virgins and perform tricks against them. However, on account of the mighty protection of Christ, the Spirit and the angels, Athanasius reminds the recipients not to fear the devil.<sup>274</sup> By contemplating God with a pure soul through virtuous life, Christian virgins are not only able to join continuously with their Bridegroom in a 'blessed union' (ϥϥϥϥ ϥϥϥϥϥϥ),<sup>275</sup> but also defend against demonic attacks and thus walk successfully on the way to heaven.<sup>276</sup> Again, we see that Athanasius' ascetic teachings for the virgins are perfectly consistent with his soteriology.

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<sup>265</sup> *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 13, 15-16, 27, 30, 32, 49 (CSCO 150, p.78, 79, 86, 88, 89, 96); *Ad Virgin. Syr.* 10, 25 (Mus 41, p.175, 185).

<sup>266</sup> *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 30, 32-33, 41 (CSCO 150, p.88, 89-90, 93); *Ad Virgin. Syr.* 31 (Mus 41, p.188); *Ser. Virgin.* 1, 10 (Mus 40, p.209, 214).

<sup>267</sup> *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 10, 13, 21, 30 (CSCO 150, p.77, 78, 82, 88); *Ad Virgin. Syr.* 4 (Mus 41, p.172); *Ser. Virgin.* 2, 14-15, 17 (Mus 40, p.209, 215-216, 217-218).

<sup>268</sup> *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 33, 49 (CSCO 150, pp.89-90, 96); *Ad Virgin. Syr.* 5, 31 (Mus 41, p.174, 188).

<sup>269</sup> Clothing (*Ad Virgin. Syr.* 4: Mus 41, p.173; *Ser. Virgin.* 8: Mus 40, p.212); sleeping (*Ad Virgin. Cop.* 14: CSCO 150, p.79); bathing (*Ad Virgin. Syr.* 4: Mus 41, p.173; *Ser. Virgin.* 12: Mus 40, p.214); eating and drinking (*Ad Virgin. Cop.* 14: CSCO 150, p.79; *Ad Virgin. Syr.* 4, 14: Mus 41, p.173, 179).

<sup>270</sup> Fasting (*Ad Virgin. Cop.* 14: CSCO 150, p.79; *Ad Virgin. Syr.* 20, 25: Mus 41, p.182, 185; *Ser. Virgin.* 9: Mus 40, p.213); vigil (*Ad Virgin. Syr.* 25: Mus 41, p.185; *Ser. Virgin.* 8: Mus 40, p.212).

<sup>271</sup> *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 13, 15 (CSCO 150, p.78, 79); *Ad Virgin. Syr.* 14 (Mus 41, pp.178-179).

<sup>272</sup> *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 13, 45-47 (CSCO 150, pp.78-79, 95); *Ad Virgin. Syr.* 7, 9 (Mus 41, p.174, 175); *Ser. Virgin.* 8-9, 12 (Mus 40, pp.212-213, 214).

<sup>273</sup> *Ser. Virgin.* 9 (Mus 40, p.213).

<sup>274</sup> *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 32 (CSCO 150, p.89).

<sup>275</sup> *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 3 (CSCO 150, p.74). See also *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 34, 44 (CSCO 150, p.90, 94); *Ad Virgin. Syr.* 3-4, 7 (Mus 41, pp.172-173, 174); *Ser. Virgin.* 16-17 (Mus 40, pp.217-218).

<sup>276</sup> *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 20-21, 32 (CSCO 150, pp.82-83, 89); *Ad Virgin. Syr.* 7, 12 (Mus 41, p.174, 177); *Ser. Virgin.* 15 (Mus 40, p.216).



In addition to general teachings, responding to circumstantial needs, Athanasius has also discussed extensively several specific topics relating to the life of a virgin. Concerning these teachings, D. B. Brakke argues that Athanasius' policy is to 'detach the virgins from competing groups by issuing a set of regulations that fostered a virginal lifestyle isolated from the contentious public life of the city, yet connected to the parish churches that the Athanasian episcopate administered.'<sup>277</sup> For this purpose, he portrayed Mary who enclosed herself totally from the secular world as an ideal virgin and asked the recipients of his virginal writings to imitate her. Since all Holy-Land pilgrimage, public baths and spiritual marriage would eventually break this artificial enclosure and provide the virgins opportunities to be attracted by enemies, Athanasius condemned all these practices. Because Hieracas' denunciation of marriage was detrimental to the unity of the church, he blamed it as well.<sup>278</sup> However, as we will see, all these teachings in fact originated from the earlier fathers or accepted tradition, and agreed with Athanasius' own theology and spirituality. Brakke's view is questionable.

### a) Marriage and Virginity

Concerning the doctrine on virginity, it seems that the greatest opponent for Athanasius was Hieracas. In his *Ad Virgin. Cop.*, the bishop used thousands of words to condemn the old ascetic and declared explicitly that the Hieracite virginal view was an 'evil thought' (ΜΕΕΥΕ ΕΥΖΟΟΥ).<sup>279</sup> All we know about Hieracas is from the pens of his antagonists; no definite writing of him survives.<sup>280</sup> According to the *Vita Epiphani*, Hieracas was an outstanding native Copt living in his 'monastery' (ἐν τῷ μοναστηρίῳ αὐτοῦ) about one mile outside Leontopolis. Because of his great reputation, the young ascetic Epiphanius who later became the bishop of Salamis went and visited him specifically during his journey to Egypt. At that time, Hieracas had numerous disciples following him.<sup>281</sup> K. Heussi places his birth between 245 and 280, and death between 335 and 370. He became a well-known figure by 320.<sup>282</sup>

Amongst our sources on Hieracas, Epiphanius' *Panarion* is the most important and extensive one. According to this treatise, Hieracas is bilingual in Greek and Coptic. On top of scriptural commentaries, he also composed many works including new psalms

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<sup>277</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, p.11.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid., chap.1.

<sup>279</sup> *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 22, 30 (CSCO 150, p.83, 87).

<sup>280</sup> There is a fourth-century fragmentary Coptic hymn surviving which some scholars attributed to Hieracas. However, the major reason of this attribution is that Hieracas is the only known fourth-century composer of Coptic hymns. This is actually an *argumentum ex ignorantia* and is not persuasive enough. Cf. E. Peterson, 'Ein Fragment des Hierakas?' *Mus* 60 (1947):257-260.

<sup>281</sup> *Vita Epiphani* 27 (PG 41, col.57-60).

<sup>282</sup> K. Heussi, *Der Ursprung des Mönchtums* (Tübingen, 1936), p.58 n.2.

(ψαλμούς). He rejects the resurrection of the body (σάρξ); only the purified soul (ψυχή) can partake in the paradise. For Hieracas, marriage was permitted in the Old Testament, but has become obsolete in the Christian Age. Through the incarnation and exemplification of Jesus Christ, the virtue of chastity and continence was brought to the earth. All Christians should imitate Him in this key aspect. A life long ascetic practice is a necessary condition for salvation. Since children who died 'before knowledge' (πρὸ γνώσεως) have not taken part in this ascetic struggle, they cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven. From this cause, Hieracas' synagogues (συναγωγαῖ), or communities,<sup>283</sup> admitted 'virgins or monks or puritans or widows' (παρθένος ἢ μονάζων ἢ ἐγκρατῆς ἢ χήρα) only. Sexually active Christians were of lower rank and had no place in Hieracite soteriology.<sup>284</sup>

Athanasius' depiction of Hieracas is in general similar to Epiphanius', but with a little more extreme view on marriage.<sup>285</sup> In a letter to virgins, Athanasius said, 'Especially take courage and condemn Hieracas, who says that marriage is evil (ἐφ' ὅπου) inasmuch as virginity is good (καλόν).'<sup>286</sup> Instead of evil and good, he explains that the difference between marriage and virginity is inferior and superior. Rather than as a necessary condition for salvation, Athanasius regards virginity as an extra virtue surpassing the law. It is not marriage that needs to be condemned, but virginity is to be praised. To the question why Christians bear fruit diversely, he appeals to free will (προαίρεσις) and rejects Hieracas' division of human nature (φύσις). On this point, Athanasius quotes the examples of biblical figures like Judas, Phygelus and Hermogenes and argues that men are by nature capable of receiving the good. It is the free will that made the difference.<sup>287</sup>

In the controversy of Athanasius and Hieracas, the most crucial problem is the interrelation between virginity and Jesus Christ. As stated before, for Hieracas, the incarnation of the Word has brought forth the start of virginity and end of marriage. It is basically an 'overturn-model.' However, for Athanasius, virginity had already existed in the Old Testament and was actualised in the lives of certain patriarchs.<sup>288</sup> The ministry of Christ has only enabled more people to participate in this virtue. This is a 'progression-

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<sup>283</sup> Heussi suggests that synagogues were occasional meetings; permanent communities are more likely. Cf. Heussi, *Der Ursprung des Mönchtums*, pp.61-63.

<sup>284</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion* 67 (GCS 37, pp.132-140). Concerning the number of Hieracites in fourth-century Egypt, in contrast with Epiphanius' description, some modern scholars such as Heussi, Elm and Brakke queries that it was a significant group threatening the authority of Athanasius. However, their supporting evidence seems to be insufficient. Cf. Heussi, *Der Ursprung des Mönchtums*, p.63; Elm, 'Virgins of God': *The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity*, p.342; Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, p.48.

<sup>285</sup> Cf. Y-M. Duval, 'La Problématique de la *Lettre aux vierges* d'Athanase,' *Mus* 88 (1975):422-424.

<sup>286</sup> *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 24 (CSCO 150, p.84).

<sup>287</sup> *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 22-24 (CSCO 150, pp.83-85).

<sup>288</sup> As mentioned before, these pre-incarnation virgins include Elijah, Elisha, Jeremiah, John the Baptist and many other prophets.

model.’ To turn down Hieracas’ concept, Athanasius cited a series of biblical texts from the Gospels and Pauline letters, and argued that the opponent had misinterpreted the Scriptures.<sup>289</sup> Both Jesus and Paul have not abolished marriage. On the contrary, they supported it. According to the Scriptures, virginity is not compulsory and its virtue is measured according to free will and desire.<sup>290</sup> Having studied Athanasius’ teachings on marriage, M. F. Wahba concludes, ‘According to Athanasius, marriage is viewed as socially legal and tolerated, and religiously blessed and sanctified.’<sup>291</sup>

For Athanasius, Christian virginity is in fact a transcendent form of marriage where a human being unites with the divine Word. On this issue, Athanasius referred specifically to the teachings of his predecessor. When a group of virgins came to him, Alexander reminded them immediately that their bridegroom was ‘the only Son of God’ (ΠΩΗΡΕ ΝΟΥΩΤ ΝΤΕΠΝΟΥΤΕΠΕ).<sup>292</sup> Later, he further explains the origin of this divine marriage: it is because the Word has become flesh that the human body of the virgins may become acceptable to Him.<sup>293</sup> Thus, what the incarnation of the Son commenced was not virginity, but the divine marriage. It transformed virgins into the brides of Christ. For this cause, although physical virginity seems to be still necessary for virgins, what Athanasius often emphasises is their spiritual union with Christ. The intellectual state and lifestyle of virgins are the things he concerns most. For him, the offspring of the holy marriage with Christ are ‘true and immortal thoughts’ (ΖΕΝΜΕΕΥΕ ΜΜΕ ΔΥΩ ΝΔΤΜΟΥ).<sup>294</sup>

The concept ‘bride of Christ’ (ἡ νύμφη τοῦ Χριστοῦ) originated from the New Testament where the Greek words γυνή and νύμφη are used for the bride and νυμφίος for the bridegroom. In the Gospels, the imagery appears in the parables of ten virgins and of wedding-guests.<sup>295</sup> Paul employs the idea allegorically on the relationship of Christ and the Church.<sup>296</sup> At the end of the Scriptures, the image of the messianic bridal community

<sup>289</sup> The biblical texts cited include Mt. 19:3-9; Lk. 1:8-23; Jn. 2:1-11; 1 Cor. 7:27, 7:38-40; and 1 Tim. 4:3, 5:14. Besides, Athanasius also reinterpreted the meaning of 1 Cor. 7:29.

<sup>290</sup> *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 26-27 (CSCO 150, pp.85-86).

<sup>291</sup> Wahba, ‘The Doctrine of Sanctification in Relation to Marriage according to St. Athanasius,’ p.287.

<sup>292</sup> *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 38 (CSCO 150, p.91).

<sup>293</sup> According to Athanasius, Alexander said here, ‘If the Word had not become flesh, how would you now be joined with him and cling to Him? But when the Lord bore the body of humanity, the body became acceptable to the Word. Therefore, you have now become virgins and brides of Christ.’ *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 43 (CSCO 150, p.94).

<sup>294</sup> *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 3 (CSCO 150, p.74). See also E. Castelli, ‘Virginity and its Meaning for Women’s Sexuality in Early Christianity,’ *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 2 (1986):61-88.

<sup>295</sup> The parable of ten virgins (Mt. 25:1-13); the parable of the best men (Mt. 9:14-17; Mk. 2:18-22; Lk. 5:33-39). Also, John the Baptist described himself figuratively as the best man of Jesus in Jn. 3:29.

<sup>296</sup> 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:22-33.

is found in the final chapters of the Revelation.<sup>297</sup> In the first century, Philo had already applied the concept of divine marriage to the Jewish virgins.<sup>298</sup> Amongst the fathers, Tertullian seems to have been the first one who employed this idea and requested the virgins to wear veils (*uelamina*) like that of contemporary married women.<sup>299</sup> A century later, the title had already become very popular. Christ is repeatedly called the bridegroom of the virgins (ὁ νυμφίος τῶν παρθένων) in the writings of Methodius on virginity.<sup>300</sup> Clearly, this title is deeply rooted in the ecclesiastical tradition and is not a creation of Athanasius.<sup>301</sup>

Also, the legitimate status of marriage is derived from the Scriptures. According to Genesis, marriage was established by God. In the New Testament, Jesus nowhere prohibited marriage. Paul even condemned those who forbade marriage as apostates.<sup>302</sup> Defending matrimony against Gnostic attacks, Clement regards the married man who has to surpass greater temptation as superior to the single.<sup>303</sup> Although Origen was a key supporter of asceticism, as J. Quasten says, he did not reject marriage, but only recommended the celibate life and the vow of chastity for the true imitator of Christ.<sup>304</sup> After examining all Athanasius' teachings on marriage, M. F. Wahba concludes, 'Athanasius' concept of the sanctity of marriage corresponds with his general doctrine of sanctification.'<sup>305</sup> It seems that what Athanasius did is to preserve the traditional view on matrimony, which is conforming to his personal theological conviction. On this aspect, his teachings are absolutely natural.

## b) The Ideal of the Virgin Mary

One of the most dominant themes in Athanasius' virginal teachings is the imitation of Mary. For the bishop, Mary is a holy and ideal virgin. She desires good works, doing

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<sup>297</sup> Rev. 19:7-9, 21:2,9, 22:17. For a discussion of the use of the imagery of 'bride of Christ' in the New Testament, see J. Jeremias, 'νύμφη, νυμφίος,' *TDNT* 4:1099-1106.

<sup>298</sup> Philo mentions that the aged virgins in the Jewish ascetic community of the Therapeutae had taken the Wisdom as their spouse. In this divine marriage, they bore intellectual rays as their offspring by which one could see the teachings of the Wisdom. Cf. Philo, *De Vita Contemplativa* 68 (Colson, 9:155).

<sup>299</sup> Tertullian, *De Virginibus Velandis* 16 (PL 2, col.911).

<sup>300</sup> Methodius, *Convivium Decem Virginum* 11.2 (SC 95, pp.310-320).

<sup>301</sup> On this point, P. Brown concludes, 'It is noticeable that the language of the Song of Songs, which had been applied by Origen to the relation of Christ with the soul of every person, male or female, came, in the course of the fourth century, to settle heavily, almost exclusively, on the body of the virgin woman.' Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, p.274. See also F. E. Consolino, 'Veni huc a Libano: La sponsa del Cantico dei Cantici come modello per le vergini negli scritti esortatori di Ambrogio,' *Athenaeum* NS 62 (1984):399-415.

<sup>302</sup> 1 Tim. 4:1-5.

<sup>303</sup> Clement, *Stromata* 7.12.70 (GCS 17, p.51).

<sup>304</sup> Quasten, *Patrology*, vol.2, p.96.

<sup>305</sup> Wahba, 'The Doctrine of Sanctification in Relation to Marriage according to St. Athanasius,' p.294.



what is proper, having true thoughts in faith and purity.<sup>306</sup> For this reason, Athanasius exhorted the virgins to imitate her everywhere so that all of them might become mirror images of 'the bearer of God' (Τῆς ἑνταῦκα πειννοῦτε). In a letter to the virgins, he writes explicitly, 'If a woman desires to remain a virgin and bride of Christ, she can look to her [Mary's] life and imitate it, and the edification of her destiny will suffice for establishing her own virginity.'<sup>307</sup>

According to Athanasius' portraiture, Mary remained in virginity forever. On this issue, he cites John 19:26-27 and explains that the Lord's entrustment of His mother to John on the cross is a powerful proof of her perpetual virginity. If she had been married and had had her children, Jesus would not have given her to other people and caused her to abandon her own family.<sup>308</sup> Mariology has long been a matter of debate in church history. The perpetual virginity of Mary was first hinted in Ignatius' epistle to the Ephesians<sup>309</sup> and asserted in a second-century apocryphal book attributed to James, which appears to have had great influence on subsequent Mariology.<sup>310</sup> Contrasting her obedience with the disobedience of Eve, both Justin and Irenaeus associated Mary with the work of redemption. Seemingly, they supported the virginity of Mary too.<sup>311</sup> The father who most clearly denied the perpetual virginity of Mary is Tertullian. Against Docetism, he defended the humanity of Christ and argued that His body was really born of the very substance of a woman. To intensify this doctrine, he rejected the virginity of Mary *in partu* and *post partum*.<sup>312</sup> Although the Mariology of the whole Catholic Church was diverse, the position of the Alexandrian teachers was quite consistent. Appealing to the *Protevangelium Iacobi*, Clement held that Mary's childbearing was exempt from physical travail.<sup>313</sup> In addition to virginity *ante partum*, Origen also maintained that Mary had remained a virgin in the rest of her life.<sup>314</sup> It appears that the perpetual virginity of Mary had already become a generally accepted view in Alexandria by the time of Athanasius.

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<sup>306</sup> *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 13 (CSCO 150, p.78).

<sup>307</sup> *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 11 (CSCO 150, p.77). See also *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 12 (CSCO 150, pp.77-78).

<sup>308</sup> *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 10 (CSCO 150, p.77).

<sup>309</sup> Ignatius, *Epistula ad Ephesios* 19 (Lightfoot & Harmer, p.148).

<sup>310</sup> This book *Protevangelium Iacobi* appears in more than thirty Greek manuscripts and in Syriac, Armenian, Coptic, and Old Slavonic translations. Its influence is obvious in the fourth-century Latin papyrus hymn on Virgin Mary found in R. Roca-Puig, ed., *Himne a la Verge Maria: 'Psalm responsorius,' papir llati del segle iv*, Barcelona, 1965.

<sup>311</sup> Justin, *Dialogus cum Tryphone Iudaeo* 100 (PTS 47, pp.242-243); Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 3.22.4, 5.19.1 (PG 7, col.958-960, 1175-1176). Their position on the perpetuity of Mary's virginity is quite ambiguous and no general agreement has been reached amongst scholars yet.

<sup>312</sup> Tertullian, *De Carne Christi* 23 (PL 2, col.790).

<sup>313</sup> Clement, *Stromata* 7.16.93-94 (GCS 17, p.66).

<sup>314</sup> Origen, *Homiliae in Lucam* 7 (GCS 35, pp.43-44). In a commentary, he says plainly, 'Mary conceived and gave birth as a virgin (*virgo concepit et peperit*).'<sup>314</sup> Origen, *Homiliae in Leviticum* 8.2 (PG 12, col.493).



Under the pen of Athanasius, Mary had already been very spiritually mature when she was young. She kept herself away from the worldly attractions, calmly remained in her house, and contemplated divine reality only. Praying to God and studying the Scriptures were her greatest pleasures. Internally, she purified her soul through controlling her passion and not allowing any evil thought to dwell in her. Externally, she performed virtuous acts secretly and spent the excess of her labour on the poor. Like an inborn ascetic, she moderated her speaking, clothing, sleeping, eating and drinking all the time. Instead of visible bread, she preferred fasting and the words of truth. She stayed at home unless going to the temple with her parents to whom she submitted like a slave. Excepting those sent from God, she evaded any contact with males. Death was not fearful for her; rather, she aspired to enter the gates of heaven daily.<sup>315</sup>

Certainly, all these descriptions are not from the Scriptures. Neither the Old nor the New Testament has mentioned the childhood of Mary. However, this does not imply that Athanasius invented the image of Mary on his own. According to the *Protevangelium Iacobi*, Mary was a human creature entirely enclosed in a sacred environment. From the time when she was six months old, her mother made a sanctuary (ἁγίασμα) in her bedchamber (τῷ κοιτῶνι αὐτῆς), and did not permit anything common (κοινὸν) or unclean (ἀκάθαρτον) to pass through it. She was dedicated to the temple at the age of three and grew up in total separation from the secular world.<sup>316</sup> Many writers, especially those in Egypt, followed this teaching closely. In the Coptic manuscripts preserved in the British Museum, a description of Mary very similar to that of Athanasius may be found.<sup>317</sup> As the date of this late antique literature is uncertain, we cannot say precisely what the interrelation of the bishop and these ancient writers is. However, according to the model in the second-century *Protevangelium Iacobi*, they were very probably both influenced by the same Egyptian tradition. In other words, on Mariology, Athanasius is only a follower of an existent view popular in his own province.

### c) Miscellaneous Subjects

Accompanying the two above, Athanasius has also touched on the following subjects for practical needs of his time. Again, all of them are consonant with Athanasius' theology and his general attitude on virginity.

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<sup>315</sup> *Ad Virgin. Cop.* 13-17 (CSCO 150, pp.78-80).

<sup>316</sup> *Protevangelium Iacobi* 5-8 (Strycker, pp.84-104).

<sup>317</sup> For example, a manuscript pictures Mary like this: 'She was pure in her body and her soul, she never put her face outside the door of the Temple, she never looked at a strange man, and she never moved herself to gaze upon the face of a young man. Her apparel was dainty. Her tunic came down to her seal; and her headcloth came down over her eyes...She never craved for a large quantity of food, neither did she walk about in the market-place of her city.' E. A. W. Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts in the Dialect of Upper Egypt* (London, 1915), p.655.

## i) The Holy-Land Pilgrimage

Early in the beginning of third century, Christians had already started to travel to the places closely associated with Jesus and the apostles, especially those in Palestine.<sup>318</sup> After the emperor Constantine arrived in the East, he began to contribute revenues to Christian constructions in the Holy Land. Amongst them, the most representative are those located at what Eusebius of Caesarea called the 'three mystical caves' (τρισὶν ἄντροις μυστικοῖς).<sup>319</sup> In 327, Constantine's mother Helena journeyed to Jerusalem, which started a fad of Holy Land pilgrimage.<sup>320</sup> Basically, Athanasius' *Ad Virgin. Syr.* was addressed to a group of Alexandrian virgins who had just returned from Palestine. The journey was apparently successful, in that the virgins had traced all the major events in the life of Jesus, including his nativity, crucifixion and ascension.<sup>321</sup> As the holy sites were for the virgins the place where Christ dwelt, they 'shed streams of bitter tears' when they were leaving.<sup>322</sup>

While consoling them, Athanasius announced an alternative view of the Holy Land which modern scholars have called the 'spiritual concept.'<sup>323</sup> In addition to the earthly Jerusalem, he told the virgins that Christ 'lives also in our temple (مسجد) if we keep (its) holiness undefiled always.'<sup>324</sup> In other words, one does not need to pilgrimage to the geographical Palestine to find the paradise. In fact, the virgins are always in the Holy Land if they preserve their purity. Their internal minds are the holy places where Christ actually dwells. For Athanasius, the true Jerusalem is in heaven. What the virgins really need to pursue is not bodily pilgrimage, but to walk on the way to God. Instead of eastwards, they should go inwards and upwards.<sup>325</sup> Such a notion of the spiritual Jerusalem was later taken up by Gregory of Nyssa and Jerome.<sup>326</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> The earliest known Christian who travelled to the Holy-Land is Melito of Sardis (d. c. 190) and the next is Alexander (d. 251), a bishop from Cappadocia who was made bishop of Jerusalem when he journeyed there. Cf. Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 4.26, 6.11 (PG 20, col.396, 541).

<sup>319</sup> These three caves are the cave of the nativity in Bethlehem, the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and the cave of the ascension on the Mount of Olives. Cf. Eusebius, *Vita Imperatoris Constantini—Oratio Eusebii de laudibus Constantini in ejus tricennialibus habita* 9 (PG 20, col.1369). See also E. D. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire AD 312-460* (Oxford, 1982), pp.6-27; and P. W. L. Walker, *Holy City, Holy Places?* (Oxford, 1990), pp.171-281.

<sup>320</sup> For the date of Helena's pilgrimage, see Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage*, pp.29-35.

<sup>321</sup> *Ad Virgin. Syr.* 1-2, 6 (*Mus* 41, pp.170-171, 174). See also S. Elm, 'Perceptions of Jerusalem Pilgrimage as Reflected in Two Early Sources on Female Pilgrimage (3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D.),' *StP* 20 (1989):219-223.

<sup>322</sup> *Ad Virgin. Syr.* 1 (*Mus* 41, p.170).

<sup>323</sup> Cf. Elm, 'Perceptions of Jerusalem Pilgrimage as Reflected in Two Early Sources on Female Pilgrimage,' p.220.

<sup>324</sup> *Ad Virgin. Syr.* 3 (*Mus* 41, p.172).

<sup>325</sup> *Ad Virgin. Syr.* 3-6 (*Mus* 41, pp.172-174). See also Elm, 'Perceptions of Jerusalem Pilgrimage as Reflected in Two Early Sources on Female Pilgrimage,' p.221.

<sup>326</sup> Gregory, *Epistulae* 2 (SC 363, pp.106-122); Hieronymus, *Epistulae* 58 (CSEL 54, pp.527-541).

This belief echoes well with Athanasius' doctrinal writings. In his *De Incarn.*, he points out that the earthly Jerusalem is only a shadow (ἡ σκιά). Its destruction is one of the signs of the coming of the Word.<sup>327</sup> Using a similar typology, Athanasius contrasts the Jewish Passover and the Christian Easter in his festal letters and proclaims that the shadowed rites in Jerusalem have already been superseded.<sup>328</sup> Although another city called Aelia Capitolina stood on the same site, Palestine no longer had much religious significance for him.<sup>329</sup> In the New Testament era, only the heavenly reality is meaningful. Besides, the emphasis on spiritual journey does also match closely with Athanasius' general ascetic teachings. Nothing in his view on Holy Land pilgrimage is unexpected.

## ii) The Public Baths

In Roman cities, bathing was an essential part of daily life. While only the wealthy could afford to have baths in their own homes, the public baths became facilities widely used by the general citizens. In addition to bathing, people also had different personal and social activities there.<sup>330</sup> During the republican period, most public baths had separate sections for male and female. However, as new baths were gradually set up in the early imperial period, public baths without sexual partition appeared. Mixed bathing remained popular at least to the end of fourth century.<sup>331</sup> In accordance with this open setting, Athanasius urged the virgins not to use the public baths. By quoting the examples of Sarah, Rachel, Miriam and Peter, he told the virgins that a basin was sufficient for them to wash away their dirt. He then added, 'For they who were pure (ساف) on the inside were also completely pure on the outside.'<sup>332</sup> For him, spiritual purity is far more important than bodily cleanliness. In addition to this ontological reason, Athanasius has also provided two practical and moral reasons for his prohibition of the virgin's public bathing. Firstly, as brides of Christ, the virgins should guard and seal their 'garden' so that no one could enter except the 'Gardener' himself.<sup>333</sup> As public bathing might have the danger of exposing the naked bodies of virgins in front of males, it was not fitting for them to use them. So, Athanasius asked them to imitate the dove (سوس) which 'does not take off her garment or reveal her nudity.'<sup>334</sup> Besides, exposure of the naked bodies might also defile the souls of the male viewers and hence drag them down to corruption. On this

<sup>327</sup> *De Incarn.* 40 (Thomson, p.232).

<sup>328</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 1.7-9, 4.4, 6.12 (Cureton, pp.17-19, 34-35, 6); *Ep. Fest.* 2 (CSCO 150, pp.38-41).

<sup>329</sup> For the name of the city, see Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage*, p.149.

<sup>330</sup> Cf. J. Carcopino, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*, ed. H. T. Rowell, tr. E. O. Lorimer (London, 1941), pp.254-263.

<sup>331</sup> Cf. R. B. Ward, 'Women in Roman Baths,' *HThR* 85 (1992):125-147.

<sup>332</sup> *Ad Virgin. Syr.* 16 (*Mus* 41, p.180).

<sup>333</sup> *Ad Virgin. Syr.* 30 (*Mus* 41, p.187).

<sup>334</sup> *Ad Virgin. Syr.* 15 (*Mus* 41, p.179).

point, Athanasius cited Bathsheba and Susannah who respectively caused King David and two deacons to fall as examples. Since the male is generally unable to resist such temptation, it is the responsibility of the female to cover their bodies.<sup>335</sup>

Again, this view on public baths coheres with Athanasius' theology and general ascetic teachings. As the brides of Christ taking ascetic practices, virgins should renounce all types of bodily enjoyment including bathing and focus solely on spiritual realities. As an ideal exemplar, Antony did not even bathe his feet with water.<sup>336</sup> Besides, his view is also conforming to the teachings of the earlier fathers. About a century earlier, Cyprian had already forbidden the virgins to participate in drunken wedding banquets (*temulenta convivio*) and go to promiscuous public baths (*promiscuas balneas*) using the same reasons as Athanasius. Perhaps inspired by Clement's statement 'from looking (ἐκσπορᾶν) people get to loving (ἐρᾶν),' both the two fathers believed that just a look of the naked female bodies would inevitably arouse lust in male onlookers and cause them to fall.<sup>337</sup> When compared with Cyprian's, nothing in Athanasius' teachings on public baths is new.

### iii) The Spiritual Marriage

Spiritual marriage, which some scholars called pseudo-marriage, means non-relative ascetics of both sexes living together in a single house. In the early church, the virgins who were involved in spiritual marriage were called ἀγαπηταί, συνεισάκται (*subintroductae*), or ἀδελφαί (*sorores*). This practice existed at least by the time of Hermas' *Shepherd*.<sup>338</sup> The reasons why Christian ascetics participated in this type of life were both practical and spiritual.<sup>339</sup> As stated before, virgins in Athanasius' time came diversely from various social classes. While some of them were wealthy enough to accommodate others, many were living in poverty. To fulfil their daily needs, while many virgins went into female communities or tried to earn money themselves, some sought shelter with males. On top of financial protection, by living together, the virgins might also gain spiritual guidance and companionship from the male ascetics. Of course, it was the latter that the participators usually used to justify their living arrangements.<sup>340</sup>

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<sup>335</sup> *Ad Virgin. Syr.* 17 (*Mus* 41, p.180).

<sup>336</sup> *V. Ant.* 93 (SC 400, p.372). On this base, Athanasius wrote in a letter to the virgins, 'Others in the ascetic life do not touch the water even with their fingertips.' *Ad Virgin. Syr.* 17 (*Mus* 41, p.180).

<sup>337</sup> Cyprian, *De Habitu Virginum* 18-19 (CSEL 3.1, pp.200-201); Clement, *Paedagogus* 3.5.32 (GCS 12, p.255).

<sup>338</sup> Hermas, *Shepherd: Similitudines* 9.11 (Lightfoot & Harmer, p.488). Some modern scholars even suggest that Paul's teaching in 1 Cor. 7:36-38 was referring to spiritual marriage. For discussion of this issue, see A. C. Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets* (Minneapolis, 1990), pp.87-89, 224-225.

<sup>339</sup> For reasons of spiritual marriage, see E. A. Clark, 'John Chrysostom and the Subintroductae,' *Ascetic Piety and Women's Faith*, ed. E. A. Clark (Lewiston, 1986), pp.278-282; and Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, pp.266-267.

<sup>340</sup> According to Athanasius' virginal letters, the Alexandrian virgins also used 'fellowship' (ἑταίρεσις) and 'spiritual love' (ἡλικία καὶ ἀγάπη) to defend their choice. Cf. *Ad Virgin. Syr.* 21 (*Mus* 41, p.182).



With reasons similar to those invoked in the case of the public baths, Athanasius condemned the act of spiritual marriage. For him, the virgins' regular conversation and communication with men is like adding a lot of fuel to their internal fire of lust. The hidden risk is considerable.<sup>341</sup> Besides, as brides of Christ, the virgins had promised to serve the Lord undividedly. Spiritual marriage would not only cause them to be distracted from the original attentive state, but also tempt them to commit the sin of adultery and bring in the Lord's fearful jealousy. On this point, Athanasius explained, 'For just as it is impossible for two men in the world to have one wife, so too one soul cannot perfectly be with God and with humanity.'<sup>342</sup> Having chosen to unite with Christ, the virgins should serve Him exclusively. Any intimate relation with another male is improper. To the male participators, Athanasius warned, 'Be distant from other men's wives; do not embrace a woman who is not yours.'<sup>343</sup>

Certainly, Athanasius is not the first bishop who opposed spiritual marriage. Long before him, Irenaeus, Tertullian and Cyprian had already written to warn of the latent dangers in the practice.<sup>344</sup> About 306, in the Synod of Elvira, the Spanish bishops had already issued a canon, which stated that a priest might live with only his sister or daughter. No living with a stranger was permitted.<sup>345</sup> Later in 314, around 12 to 18 bishops from Asia Minor and Syria met in Ancyra. During the synod, they set a series of canons on ecclesiastical penalties in which spiritual marriage was again prohibited.<sup>346</sup> Unquestionably, the one that influenced Athanasius most is the Council of Nicaea in 325. In the council, the following canon was issued: 'The great Synod absolutely forbids, and it cannot be permitted to either bishop, presbyter, deacon, or any other cleric, to have in his house a *subintroducta* (συνείσακτον), with the exception of his mother, sister, aunt, or other such persons as are free from all suspicions.'<sup>347</sup> Although the canon limited the choice of housemates of the clergy only, a view against spiritual marriage was clearly concealed. As a steadfast and lifelong defender of Nicene faith, Athanasius would certainly obey and promote the idea of this order. The forbiddance of spiritual marriage in his virginal writings seems to be inevitable.<sup>348</sup>

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<sup>341</sup> *Ad Virgin. Syr.* 20-21 (*Mus* 41, pp.181-182).

<sup>342</sup> *Ad Virgin. Syr.* 24 (*Mus* 41, p.184).

<sup>343</sup> *Ad Virgin. Syr.* 28 (*Mus* 41, p.186).

<sup>344</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 1.6.3 (PG 7, col.508-509); Tertullian, *De Exhortatione Castitatis* 12 (PL 2, col.927-928); and Cyprian, *Epistulae* 4, 13.5, 14.3 (CSEL 3.2, pp.472-478, 507-508, 512).

<sup>345</sup> The canon reads, 'It has been decided that a bishop, or any other member of the clergy, may only have his sister, or his daughter, if she is a virgin dedicated to God (*virginem dicatam Deo*), living with him; he may not live with a stranger.' *Canones Elvirae Synodi* 27 (Hefele, p.148).

<sup>346</sup> The related canon reads, 'We certainly forbid virgins (*παρθένους*) to live as sisters (*ἀδελφὰς*) with men.' *Canones Ancyranae Synodi* 19 (Hefele, p.218).

<sup>347</sup> *Canones Nicaenae Concilii* 3 (Hefele, p.379).

<sup>348</sup> For discussions of spiritual marriage, see also D. Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, Princeton, 1993.



## 2. Teachings to Desert Monks

The term 'monasticism' derived from the Greek noun μοναστήριον, which was used in ancient time for both the individual hermitage and the communal cloister.<sup>349</sup> In 394, a party of travellers visited the monasteries of Egypt. In Oxyrhynchus, a large city in the Thebaid, they reported, 'The city is so full (γέμει) of monasteries (μοναστηρίων) that the very walls (τὰ τείχη) resound with the voices of monks. Other monasteries encircle it outside, so that the outer city (τὴν ἔξω πόλιν) forms another town alongside the inner. The temples and capitals (οἱ ναοὶ καὶ τὰ καπετώλια) of the city were bursting with monks; every quarter of the city was inhabited by them (κατὰ πᾶν μέρος τῆς πόλεως οἱ μοναχοὶ ὥκουν).'<sup>350</sup> The account may be exaggerated, but it pictures well the prosperity of monasticism in fourth-century Egypt. The causes of the monastic movement have been variously proposed by scholars. While E. R. Dodds sees it as a natural psychological reaction to the age of anxiety common to both Christians and pagans,<sup>351</sup> P. Brown argues that it was a sociological response to the needs of the contemporary society.<sup>352</sup> Nowadays, the majority of scholars still hold the traditional view that the monastic movement was a result of the protest against the church's growing conformity to the Roman and Hellenistic way of life after Constantine, and was a substitution for martyrdom in the post-persecution period.<sup>353</sup> Besides, as H. Chadwick says, monasticism was also an institutional expression of the old ascetic ideal.<sup>354</sup> In all probability, these diverse causes are not mutually exclusive. It seems that they all contributed in the rapid development of monasticism in the Roman Empire.

At the time of Athanasius, monastic life in Egypt was characterised by an extraordinary degree of variety and fluidity. Several models of ascetic life coexisted and competed with each other. According to geographical location, there were three distinct types: monastic life within cities and towns, that in areas just outside the borders of the village or town, and that in the isolation of the desert.<sup>355</sup> In the apologetic treatises of Athanasius, we know that there were urban monks in the Alexandrian church who were

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<sup>349</sup> Cf. J. E. Goehring, 'Monasticism,' *EEChr* 2:769.

<sup>350</sup> *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* 5 (Festugière, pp.41-42).

<sup>351</sup> E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety: Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine* (Cambridge, 1965), pp.31-36.

<sup>352</sup> P. Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 1978), pp.81-101; and 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity,' *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (London, 1982), pp.103-152.

<sup>353</sup> E. E. Malone, *The Monk and the Martyr*, Washington, 1950; Bouyer, *A History of Christian Spirituality*, vol.1, pp.305-306; W. H. C. Frend, 'Town and Countryside in Early Christianity,' *The Church in Town and Countryside*, ed. D. Baker (Oxford, 1979), pp.27-28; S. G. Hall, 'The Sects under Constantine,' *Voluntary Religion*, ed. W. J. Sheils and D. Wood (Oxford, 1986), p.4; and Goehring, 'Monasticism,' 2:769-770.

<sup>354</sup> Chadwick, 'The Ascetic Ideal in the History of the Church,' p.1.

<sup>355</sup> For a discussion of these three types of ascetic life, see Elm, 'Virgins of God': *The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity*, chap.7-10.

reported as having been trampled by the Arian party.<sup>356</sup> As seen from the *V. Ant.*, Antony began his ascetic practice within his own town. After this initial phase, he went out to the tombs some distance from it. Here, the hagiography reported that the ascetics at that time generally disciplined themselves in isolation ‘not far from his own village’ (οὐ μακρὰν τῆς ἰδίας κώμης).<sup>357</sup> After spending several years in charitable service in his own hamlet, another famous abba Pachomius also moved out to the borders of the village and joined an old anchorite (ἀναχωρητὸς) called Palamon.<sup>358</sup> It was only after these preparatory stages that the great monks progressed into the desert (ἐρημος) where they rendered the places into cities of monks.

From another angle, based on the theological and political position, we may divide the monks into Athanasian, anti-Athanasian and the neutral. On the one hand, Antony, Pachomius, Orsisius, Theodore, Amun, and their followers are traditionally regarded as supporters of the orthodox camp. All of them had good relationships with Athanasius and his party.<sup>359</sup> On the other hand, from the London papyri H. I. Bell published in 1924, we know that the Melitians had already developed their own well-organised monastic communities before 334.<sup>360</sup> Besides, Hieracas and the Manichaeans also had their own ascetic communities in the same period.<sup>361</sup> We cannot say precisely whether or not there were any Arian monasteries in fourth-century Egypt. At least, Arius was said to have been excommunicated with ‘a large crowd of people, virgins and other clerics whom he had defiled’ (πλῆθος πολὺ, οἱ ἅπ’ αὐτοῦ κεχραμμένοι παρθενεουσῶν καὶ ἄλλων κληρικῶν).<sup>362</sup> All these groups had been openly condemned by Athanasius or his associates, and were clearly anti-Athanasian.<sup>363</sup> Nowadays, more and more scholars believe that many monks were actually not interested in theological matters. They just

<sup>356</sup> *Ad Episc.* 3 (PG 25, col.229); *Apol. Ar.* 30 (PG 25, col.300).

<sup>357</sup> *V. Ant.* 3 (SC 400, p.136).

<sup>358</sup> *Vita Pachomii—Graeca* 6 (Athanasakis, pp.8-10).

<sup>359</sup> All these famous abbots were later venerated as saints in the Church.

<sup>360</sup> The Melitian monasteries were usually located in or near the villages and were led by a group of elders. Cf. London papyri 1913-1922; H. I. Bell, ed. and tr., *Jews and Christians in Egypt: The Jewish Troubles in Alexandria and the Athanasian Controversy Illustrated by Texts from Greek Papyri in the British Museum* (London, 1924), pp.43-99. See also E. A. Judge, ‘The Earliest Use of Monachos for “Monk” and the Origins of Monasticism,’ *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 20 (1977):72-89.

<sup>361</sup> Cf. F. Wisse, ‘Gnosticism and Early Monasticism in Egypt,’ *Gnosis: Festschrift für H. Jonas*, ed. B. Aland (Göttingen, 1978), pp.431-440; and G. S. Stroumsa, ‘The Manichaean Challenge to Egyptian Christianity,’ *REC*, pp.307-319. An alternative view is given in A. Veilleux, ‘Monasticism and Gnosis in Egypt,’ *REC*, pp.271-306.

<sup>362</sup> Besides, Epiphanius also reports that Arius had managed to draw apart from the Alexandrian Church seven hundred virgins (ἑπτακοσίας παρθενεούσας), seven presbyters (πρεσβυτέρους ἑπτὰ) and twelve deacons (διακόνους δώδεκα). Cf. Epiphanius, *Panarion* 68.4, 69.3 (GCS 37, p.144, 154).

<sup>363</sup> While Hieracas, the Melitians and the Arians were reprobated by the bishop himself, the Manichaeans were criticised mainly by Serapion of Thmuis, a close friend of Athanasius. Cf. Serapion, *Adversus Manichaeum* (Casey, pp.29-78).

concentrated on their own internal ascetic practices and supported neither side in the Arian controversy.<sup>364</sup>

According to institutional structure, there were again three types: eremitic, semi-eremitic and coenobitic. Amongst the monastic fathers, Antony who progressed deeper and deeper into the desert is a representative of the first type. Although he sometimes went out to guide his admirers, he mainly disciplined himself solitarily in his own hermitage near the Red Sea. Following this exemplar, the Antonian monks were all independent anchorites loosely linked with each other.<sup>365</sup> With a little difference, Amun and Macarius founded their semi-eremitic monastic communities in the desert at the Mount of Nitria and Wâdi n' Natrûn respectively. After these two abbas retired for solitude, many disciples arrived to join them. As a result, eremitic settlements where monks lived together formed in different places of the desert.<sup>366</sup> In church history, Pachomius is commonly credited as the innovator of coenobitic monastic life. Different from the first two types, the Pachomian monks shared a life under a common monastic rule begun by their founder. At the time when he died, Pachomius had altogether established nine monasteries and two nunneries along the Nile in Upper Egypt; three thousand monks were under his guidance.<sup>367</sup> In addition to the four above, there were also many other leading monks, such as Shenoute of Atripe.<sup>368</sup> All of them contributed diversely in the monasticism of fourth-century Egypt.<sup>369</sup>

As stated before, the Greek noun *παρθενία* that Athanasius often used referred to sexual renunciation of both sexes in ancient time. Theoretically, his teachings for female virgins should be applicable to male monks as well. Nevertheless, according to his writings, Athanasius apparently had opposite messages for the two groups of ascetics. For this reason, some scholars such as D. B. Brakke argue that Athanasius had two

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<sup>364</sup> For example, L. W. Barnard writes concerning the monks, 'For some of them, *praxis* was more important than orthodoxy.' Barnard, *The Monastic Letters of Saint Athanasius the Great*, p.x. See also Wisse, 'Gnosticism and Early Monasticism in Egypt,' pp.431-440.

<sup>365</sup> *V. Ant.* 49-51, 54-55. See also S. Rubensen, *The Letters of St. Antony: Origenist Theology, Monastic Tradition and the Making of a Saint*, Bibliotheca Historico-Ecclesiastica Lundensis 24, Lund, 1990.

<sup>366</sup> Cf. Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* 8, 17 (Butler, 2:28-29, 43-44); *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* 21-22 (Festugière, pp.123-130); Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 4.23 (PG 67, col.509-517); Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.14 (PG 67, col.900-901); and *Apophthegmata Patrum* (PG 65, col.72-440).

<sup>367</sup> *Vita Pachomii* 12, 32, 54, 79, 83 (Athanasakis, p.16, 44, 80-82, 114, 120); Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* 32 (Butler, 2:87-96); Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 3.14 (PG 67, col.1073-1076). See also P. Rousseau, *Pachomius: The Making of a Community in Fourth-Century Egypt*, the Transformation of the Classical Heritage 6, Berkeley, 1985; and J. E. Goehring, 'New Frontiers in Pachomian Studies,' *REC*, pp.236-257.

<sup>368</sup> Cf. Besa, *Sinuthii Vita Bohairice*. See also other heroic monks and abbots listed in *Apophthegmata Patrum*; *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*; and Palladius' *Historia Lausiaca*.

<sup>369</sup> For discussions of the fourth-century Egyptian monastic movement, see Bouyer, *A History of Christian Spirituality*, vol.1, pp.303-330; D. J. Chitty, *The Desert a City*, Oxford, 1966; G. Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, The Oxford Early Christian Studies, Oxford, 1993; and Goehring, 'Monasticism,' 2:771-772.

different stratagems for them.<sup>370</sup> Since monasticism will ultimately detach believers from the church, it is not an unmixed blessing for Athanasius. Here, the bishop's policy for the monks is entirely different from that of the female virgins. Rather than isolation, he used a strategy of inclusion. On this point, Brakke pictures Athanasius as a clever politician who employed two methods to recruit the monks into his camp. On the one hand, he put himself into the monastic circles. By issuing opinions on matters of ascetic practice, such as sleep deprivation and nocturnal emissions, he asserted the right of bishops to intervene in monastic affairs. On the other hand, he tried to involve the monks in the public life of the Church by appointing many of them as bishops. While forbidding the female virgins to participate in the ecclesiastical controversies, he rallied the monks to his side and persuaded them to hate the 'heretics'.<sup>371</sup>

However, if one examines Athanasius' teachings to the monks more deeply, he will find that their spiritual principles are basically the same as that to the female virgins. The apparent contrariety may actually be explained in terms of different situational problems. While certain female virgins did not have enough discipline, some monks exercised it too extremely.<sup>372</sup> In each case, Athanasius put forwards his ascetic ideal with different emphases in order to correct the mistakes. When tracing the development of the practice of sexual renunciation in late antiquity, P. Brown observes that for Origen the present human body is adjusted to the peculiar needs of its soul so as to heal it accordingly. Basic aspects of human beings associated with the body, such as sexuality, are primarily provisional. They play no role in defining the essence of a person. Physical difference is always subordinate to intellectual distinction.<sup>373</sup> Following his predecessor, Athanasius does not distinguish people of different sexuality in his ascetic teachings. He applies the same spiritual principles to both men and women, no matter what their present situations are. For him, there is no discrimination on the way to God. Consistently, his ascetic teachings, including the following specific topics he treated in his monastic treatises, are coherent with the church tradition and his theological system.

#### a) Sleep Deprivation

In his *De Mor. Val.*, Athanasius criticised the extreme ascetic practices of sleep deprivation. According to this work, some monks had literally applied Proverbs 6:4-5 and

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<sup>370</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, pp.11-12.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*, chap.2.

<sup>372</sup> The reasons behind this difference may be many. One possible reason is that some girls were actually dedicated as virgins by their parents or masters. While most monks took up ascetic practices voluntarily, these young virgins had to do the same things unwillingly. So, they had a greater tendency of abandoning the practices.

<sup>373</sup> Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, pp.165-168.



denied sleeping at all.<sup>374</sup> With different opinions, Athanasius argued that they had misinterpreted the Scriptures. By quoting a series of biblical verses, he tries to show that a man is composed of two parts: the inner and the outer persons, or more precisely the soul and the body. Each part has its own food, members and senses.<sup>375</sup> What the Bible required is not incessant vigil of the body, but of the soul only. Citing the examples of Elisha and Daniel, he further explains that the soul can contemplate better things while the body is asleep; the mind can travel through outer places or even fly up to the heaven when the body is lying still on earth. The vigilance of the soul can help to converge one's attention on God and is good for man to pursue. In contrast, bodily sleep deprivation not only cannot contribute to this ascetic target, but even distracts one's mind from it. Although people can stay awake for a time through bodily vigil, they will eventually become 'totally asleep in their thinking' (καθεύδουσι τὸ ὅλον τῇ διανοίᾳ) and hence 'fall away from the watchfulness of the soul' (ἐκπίπτουσι τῆς κατὰ ψυχὴν γρηγορήσεως).<sup>376</sup>

Consistently, Athanasius adopts this dichotomous anthropology as an inseparable part of his theology. He declares explicitly in one of his earliest doctrinal writings, 'Thus often, when the body (τό σῶμα) is lying on the ground, a man imagines (φαντάζεται) and contemplates (θεωρεῖ) what is in the heavens; and often when the body is still (ἡρεμοῦντος), at rest (ἡσυχάζοντος) and sleeping (καθεύδοντος), a man is in inner movement—he contemplates what is outside himself, he traverses foreign lands, he meets friends, and often through them divines and learns in advance his daily actions.'<sup>377</sup> When compared with this statement, Athanasius' teachings in *De Mor. Val.* have nothing new. He just repeated what he said previously. In addition to the virgins, the bishop used his theology to measure the ascetic practices of the monks as well. As in the case of the Arians, Athanasius believes that his doctrines are orthodox and biblical. Any teaching that deviates from his own is heretic, and needed to be corrected or condemned.

Very probably, Athanasius' dualistic treatment of vigilance was inspired by his predecessor Origen. In a debate with his contemporary figures, this Alexandrian theologian discussed at length the concept of inner (ἐσω) and outer persons (ἐξω ἄνθρωποι). Similar to the outer, the inner person also has heart (καρδία), blood (αἷμα) and other human features.<sup>378</sup> Concerning the question of vigilance, Origen wrote plainly in one of his exegetical works, 'Indeed, there is sleep (ὕπνος) and watchfulness

<sup>374</sup> Prov. 6:4-5 literally reads, 'Allow no sleep to your eyes (אַל־תִּתֶּן שְׁנָה לְעֵינֶיךָ), no slumber to your eyelids (וְהִנָּמְה לְעַפְעָפֶיךָ). Free yourself, like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter (הִנָּצֵל בְּכַבְּרִי מִיָּד), like a bird from the snare of the fowler (וּבְצִפּוֹר מִיָּד יָקוֹשׁ).'

<sup>375</sup> *De Mor. Val.* 1-4, 8 (OCA 117, pp.5-8).

<sup>376</sup> *De Mor. Val.* 6 (OCA 117, p.7).

<sup>377</sup> *C. Gent.* 31 (Thomson, p.86). See also *C. Gent.* 33 (Thomson, p.90).

<sup>378</sup> Origen, *Disputatio cum Heracleida* 16-24 (SC 67, pp.88-102).



(ἐγρήγοροις), just as in the case of the outer person (τοῦ ἔξω ἀνθρώπου), so too in the case of the inner (τοῦ ἔσω).<sup>379</sup> Constantly, he applied Proverbs 6:4-5 on the attentiveness and neglectfulness of the soul, and not the wakefulness and sleepiness of the body. What the Scriptures really forbid is not bodily sleep, but the inattentiveness of the soul.<sup>380</sup>

In this disputation on sleep deprivation, two different views of asceticism are unveiled. While some ascetic traditions regarded self-denial as a target, Athanasius as well as many church fathers saw it as a means only. The purpose of ascetic practices is not to negate the body, but to focus oneself on God so that one may walk on the way to God undistractedly. Any discipline that helps in achieving this goal should be recommended, and vice versa. Since extreme bodily vigilance was an adverse obstacle for the monks' contemplation of God, he condemned the practice. In contrast with Brakke's suggestion of two opposite stratagems, Athanasius' negative attitude towards extreme sleep deprivation here matches closely with that in his *Epistula ad Virgines* preserved in Arabic. By quoting the model of his predecessor Alexander, he said to certain virgins in the city of Alexandria, 'For it is good that fasting should be in moderation, and drinking in moderation, and sleep in moderation. For if a man eats as he ought, he is strong for prayer; and so likewise if he sleeps in moderation.'<sup>381</sup> Everything is natural; nothing seems to be incongruous when compared with his general ascetic teachings.

#### b) Natural Excretion<sup>382</sup>

Another related problem Athanasius dealt with in his monastic writings is natural excretion (φυσική ἔκκρισις). Based on Matthew 15:11 'not that which enters in (τὸ εἰσερχόμενον) defiles a man, but that which goes out (τὸ ἐκπορευόμενον),' certain Egyptian monks suggested that natural excretion was unclean and sinful. Lying behind this concept is the disparagement of sexual activities, whether conjugal or not. To correct this 'heterodox thought,' Athanasius wrote specifically to Amun, the leader of a great number of monks,<sup>383</sup> and persuaded him to strengthen his flock and guide them according to the orthodox teachings. The bishop did not mention in the letter what the monks had

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<sup>379</sup> Origen, *Fragmenta in Lucam* 196 (GCS 35, p.310).

<sup>380</sup> Origen, *Commentarii in Matthaeum* 93 (GCS 38, pp.210-211); *Fragmenta e catenis in Epistulam primam ad Corinthios* 90.2-6 (*JThS* 10, p.51); *Libri in Psalmos* 3.6 (PG 12, col.1128).

<sup>381</sup> *Ad Virgin. Ara.* (PO 1, p.405). The letter was quoted by Sawirus in his *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria*.

<sup>382</sup> A more precise term is 'nocturnal emission.' Since L. W. Barnard who made the latest English translation of *Ad Amun* used the term 'natural excretion,' I follow him here for easy reference.

<sup>383</sup> According to the writings of Rufinus, Amun had at least attracted three thousand ascetics in his monastic settlements. Cf. Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.3 (PL 21, col.511). Palladius even found five thousand monks who saw Amun as their father and leader. Cf. Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* 7 (Butler, 2:25).

proposed on preventing natural excretion. Probably, it included sleep deprivation and arduous fasting. In the early fifth century, Cassian propounded that the number of natural excretions might be reduced by steady and consistent fast, careful vigilance against anger and other vices, and nightly prayer.<sup>384</sup> Although he was the founder of two monasteries in the West, his monastic teachings depended heavily upon his early sojourn amongst the Egyptian monks and could in certain degree reflect their thoughts. Based on modern study, L. W. Barnard deduces that this heterodoxy in the early Egyptian monasticism was influenced by an extreme form of encratism and is probably a type of Manichean dualism.<sup>385</sup>

Responding to the fallacy on natural excretion, Athanasius argued that the monks had misinterpreted the Scriptures. Instead of physical evacuation, he suggests that what really can defile a man is committing foul sin (τὴν δυσωδεστάτην ἁμαρτίαν) which is not from the body, but from the heart (ἀπὸ καρδίας).<sup>386</sup> In addition, Athanasius further offered five more reasons for rejecting the erroneous concept of the monks. Based on his anthropology, he first argues that everything created by God is good (καλὰ) and pure (καθαρά). As the human body is a work of God with nothing unclean (ἀκάθαρτος) by nature, it is impossible to have any defilement to proceed from it. Besides, the thought of treating natural excretion as unclean is an invention of the devil. It initially appeared to be pure, but eventually will divert the ascetics' attention from their usual salutary contemplation of God to the phenomena of the body. Furthermore, as in the case of sleep deprivation, Athanasius believes that the soul will transcend the geographical limit and travel into the spiritual realm at the time of sleeping. So, natural excretion, or nocturnal emission, is an involuntary (ἀβούλητος) occurrence independent of one's will and should not be condemned. The fourth point Athanasius raised is medical. Just like sweating and purging, natural excretion is one of the normal physical processes where surplus secretions (περιττοὶ) are evacuated from the body. Even secular physicians would agree with its necessity. In accordance with the monks' disparagement of sexual relationship, Athanasius finally argues that marriage is a teaching of the Scriptures and is honourable. All sexual activities within it are lawful and permitted. The difference between marriage and virginity is not between evil and good, but between good and better.<sup>387</sup>

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<sup>384</sup> Cassian, *De Institutis Coenobiorum et de Octo Principalium Vitiorum Remediis Libri XII* 6.23 (SC 109, pp.286-288).

<sup>385</sup> L. W. Barnard, 'The Letters of Athanasius to Amoun and Dracontius,' *StP* 26 (1993):355. See also G. Gould, 'Early Egyptian Monasticism and the Church,' *Monastic Studies, the Continuity of Tradition*, ed. J. Loades (Bangor, 1990), pp.1-10; and Stroumsa, 'The Manichaean Challenge to Egyptian Christianity,' pp.307-319.

<sup>386</sup> *Ad Amun* (PG 26, col.1172).

<sup>387</sup> *Ad Amun* (PG 26, col.1172-1173). Vivian similarly summarises Athanasius' arguments into four: 1) What God has created is good, and natural. 2) Human beings, made in the image of God, who is 'pure,' cannot be defiled by nature. 3) We are defiled only when we sin. Free will is of the utmost importance. 4)

Obviously, except the fourth one, which is specifically for this case, all arguments that Athanasius has given above are extracted from his theology or general ascetic teachings. Nothing is strange. Actually, this problem of natural excretion was not uniquely faced by Athanasius alone. According to two church orders preserved in Syria, some ancient Christians believed that natural excretion would render a man unclean and thus unsuitable for receiving the sacrament. The church orders condemn this thought as a relapse to Judaism and one that had returned to the purification requirements of the Jews. Since all Christians have been sanctified by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in baptism, none of them is unworthy to be admitted to the Eucharist unless they have apostatised against God. Neither men's natural excretion nor women's menstruation would disqualify a Christian from receiving the sacrament.<sup>388</sup> Although there were many different opinions on this issue from the fathers in late antiquity, Athanasius' position was not unsupported by the church tradition.

### c) Episcopal Appointment

In the fourth century, a number of monks were appointed as Egyptian bishops.<sup>389</sup> Since the large-scale Christian monastic movement appeared only after the conversion of the emperor Constantine, the practice of appointing monks as bishops was relatively new in Athanasius' episcopate.<sup>390</sup> To this fresh challenge, the monks appear to have made different responses. While many accepted the appointment without many objections, some refused firmly. A fifth-century monk Ammonius even cut his left ear and warned that he would cut his tongue as well to express his unwillingness to leave the desert.<sup>391</sup> Concerning the tensions that the monks had on episcopate appointment, the case of Dracontius, which Athanasius faced, is worthy for our study.

Dracontius was originally an abbot of a monastery, presumably in Nitria. Around 353 to 354, he became the bishop of Hermopolis Parva, a contested see which had once had a Melitian bishop called Agathammon.<sup>392</sup> His immediate successors Isidore and Dioscorus had both been Nitrian monks.<sup>393</sup> Apparently, Dracontius was appointed to his

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What is natural is good because God has made it; this includes the sexual parts. Cf. T. Vivian, "‘Everything Made by God is Good’: A Letter concerning Sexuality from Saint Athanasius to the Monk Amoun," *Église et Théologie* 24 (1993):95-96.

<sup>388</sup> *Didascalia Apostolorum* 26 (Gibson, pp.110-112); *Constitutiones Apostolorum* 6.15-23 (SC 329, pp.342-372).

<sup>389</sup> For lists of Egyptian bishops, see H. Munier, ed. and tr., *Recueil des listes épiscopales de l'église copte* (Cairo, 1943), pp.1-10.

<sup>390</sup> Cf. J. Muyser, 'Contribution à l'étude des listes épiscopales de l'Église copte,' *Bulletin de la Société d'archéologie copte* 10 (1944):134.

<sup>391</sup> Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* 11 (Butler, 2:33).

<sup>392</sup> *Apol. Ar.* 71 (PG 25, col.377).

<sup>393</sup> Palladius, *Hisotria Lausiaca* 10, 12, 46 (Butler, 2:29, 35, 134).

episcopate against his own will. Advised by his monks and having given them an oath (ὄρκος) of not accepting the office if elected, he fled back to his monastery. According to Athanasius, the root of Dracontius' flight was doubt of his own ability, and more importantly the monks' belief that one would deteriorate spiritually if living in the world as a priest.<sup>394</sup> From this belief, L. W. Barnard deduces that the monks were actually holding an extreme renunciation of the world and a negative view of episcopacy. They were concerned only for their own holiness.<sup>395</sup>

Responding to the choice of Dracontius, Athanasius wrote a long letter in 354 to remonstrate with the abbot to resume his office. In this letter, his view on the relationship between ecclesiastic and monastic organisations is revealed. Here, Athanasius emphasises repeatedly that episcopacy is a grace (χάρις) and a high calling (ἄνω κλήσις) of God. Once received, a man can no longer live for himself, but for his flock and other people as well. A bishop cannot feed himself only while leaving his sheep hungering. On this point, Athanasius warned Dracontius that his misconduct would eventually cause a lot of ordinary Christians to fall and give other appointed bishops opportunity to withdraw. Since different claimants were seeking the bishopric, his flight might also result in the diocese being occupied by the enemies, probably the Melitians.<sup>396</sup> Having taken the talent from the Lord, he should not bury it like the lazy servant in Matthew 25:14-30. Rather, he should imitate Paul who did his best in his ministry after receiving the high calling.<sup>397</sup>

In accordance with the false belief of the monks, Athanasius challenged that if everyone thought like this, no one would become a Christian since there would be no bishop and no church at all. As a tradition in the Nitrian monasteries, presbyters were necessary if the monks wanted to receive the sacrament regularly.<sup>398</sup> From this need, Athanasius exposed the irrationality of the monks, 'Why do they counsel you not to take up the episcopal office when they themselves want to have presbyters?'<sup>399</sup> To Dracontius himself, Athanasius dealt with his personal anxieties one by one. Concerning his oath to the Nitrian monks, the abbot was consoled that it had already been overruled by the divine call. Rather than listening to human advice, he should follow the models of

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<sup>394</sup> *Ad Drac.* 6, 8-9 (PG 25, col.529, 532-533).

<sup>395</sup> Barnard, 'The Letters of Athanasius to Amoun and Dracontius,' p.359; and *The Monastic Letters of Saint Athanasius the Great*, p.xiii.

<sup>396</sup> Modern studies have shown that the Melitian monastic organisations were very powerful in Athanasius' time. They could even rival the Pachomian monasteries in size. Cf. J. E. Goehring, 'Meletian Monastic Organization: A Challenge to Pachomian Originality,' *StP* 25 (1993):388-395.

<sup>397</sup> *Ad Drac.* 1-4 (PG 25, col.524-528).

<sup>398</sup> Cf. Chitty, *The Desert a City*, p.31. According to tradition, the Nitrian monks congregated together on Saturday and Sunday. However, Abba Apollo of Hermopolis suggested that a good monk should receive the sacrament everyday if possible. Cf. *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* 8.56 (Festugière, p.69).

<sup>399</sup> *Ad Drac.* 10 (PG 25, col.533).



Jeremiah and Moses who fulfilled their ministry for the fear of God. About his ability and weakness, he was reminded that the Lord knew his situation better than he did. What he should fear was not his own worthiness, but the account he should give to God at the Day of Judgement. To the worry of being deteriorated by a worldly office, Athanasius argued that the abbot might even grow better if he imitated the saints. After citing Paul, Peter, Elijah, Elisha and Timothy as biblical examples, he concluded that a bishop might even behave better than a monk. The heavenly crown was not given according to position (τόπος), but according to deeds (πράξις).<sup>400</sup> Many abbots had already become bishops. All of them had functioned successfully. They did not only make ascetic progress themselves, but also guided others onwards.<sup>401</sup> At last, Athanasius succeeded. Dracontius returned to his see and acted as an orthodox bishop in Hermopolis Parva. Because of the Arian controversy, he was banished to the desert near Clysma in 356 and was recalled by Julian in 362, at which time he attended a synod in Alexandria.<sup>402</sup> According to Athanasius' festal letter, Dracontius ended his episcopacy in 368.<sup>403</sup>

Episcopal appointment is primarily a model from the New Testament, in which different offices were appointed by the laying on of hands.<sup>404</sup> This practice was followed diversely in the early churches. In the 325 Council of Nicaea, it was determined that the appointment of a bishop should be approved by the metropolitan (ὁ μητροπολίτης), the bishop normally of the civil metropolis of the province.<sup>405</sup> Besides, the Council also settled the extraordinary power of the metropolitans of three principal sees over others; they were the bishop of Rome who ruled over Italy, that of Alexandria who ruled over Egypt, Libya and Pentapolis, and that of Antioch who ruled over large parts of Asia Minor.<sup>406</sup> Athanasius' appointment of Egyptian bishops was only doing what was required and authorised by the Council. According to the Pauline epistles, all church leaders, including bishops (or presbyters) and deacons, should have good esteem both inside and outside the church.<sup>407</sup> As monks were generally recognised as having better spiritual lives and personal characters in the fourth-century Egypt, their appointment as bishops was a natural choice, especially for an Alexandrian Patriarch who supported asceticism like Athanasius.

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<sup>400</sup> *Ad Drac.* 5-10 (PG 25, col.528-533).

<sup>401</sup> These abbots included Serapion of Thmuis, Apollos, Agathon, Ariston, Ammonius, Mouitos, Paul of Latopolis and many others. Cf. *Ad Drac.* 7 (PG 25, col.532).

<sup>402</sup> *Apol. Fuga* 7 (PG 25, col.653); *Hist. Ar.* 72 (PG 25, col.780); *Tom. Ant.* 1, 10 (PG 26, col.796, 808).

<sup>403</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 40 (*OLP* 15, p.146).

<sup>404</sup> Acts 6, 13:1-3, 20:28; 1 Tim. 5:22; 2 Tim. 1:6; and Tit. 1:5.

<sup>405</sup> *Canones Nicaenae Concilii* 4 (Hefele, p.381).

<sup>406</sup> *Canones Nicaenae Concilii* 6 (Hefele, p.388). The Council even commanded those who became bishop without the approval (γνώμη) of these metropolitans to resign.

<sup>407</sup> 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Tit. 1:5-9.



Although Athanasius had given many different reasons to regain Dracontius for his episcopate, he did not deviate from his ascetic principles. On the contrary, every concept he used, except logical arguments, may be derived from his general ascetic teachings. Like the paschal fast, he regards episcopal appointment as a high vocation from God. Everywhere, he asked the recipient to obey the requirements of the Scriptures and imitate the saints. Echoing his virginal writings, he rejected the view that monasticism was the only form of ascetic life.<sup>408</sup> In fact, as seen from Athanasius' ascetic formula 'contemplating God with a pure soul through virtuous life,' inward contemplative life and outward virtuous acts for others were not separable. Final perfection would not be achieved without obeying what God asks one to do, including loving the neighbour as oneself. The monks' intention of focusing only on one's own life, disregarding that of others, contradicted seriously the ascetic ideal of Athanasius. His objection and condemnation are totally intelligible.

#### **D. Short Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have examined all the major ascetic teachings of Athanasius. Basing his arguments on his soteriology, he exhorts everyone to contemplate God with a pure soul through virtuous life so that all might walk on the way to God successfully. Here, all believers, whether virginal or married, are required to discipline themselves according to the teachings of the Scriptures and the models of the saints and obey the timely call of God. To the general congregation, he instructs them to intensify their ascetic practices before and during the paschal feast. To the female virgins, he exhorts them to imitate Mary and forbids them from Holy-Land pilgrimage, public baths and spiritual marriage. To the desert monks, he gave them his opinions about sleep deprivation and natural excretion. Besides, he also appointed the monks to take up episcopacy. Apparently, the topics are diverse and various. But actually, his recommendations are all set according to the ecclesiastical tradition, and are conforming to Athanasius' own theological conviction. What the bishop did is just apply the orthodox belief to the situational challenges in his time.

Concerning D. B. Brakke's argument that Athanasius' asceticism was actually a planned political program for church formation, our discussion in this chapter has made it clear that the ascetic teachings of the bishop are natural inheritances of the ecclesiastical tradition and are governed by his theology and spirituality. All of them have their roots either in the Scriptures or the earlier fathers. At the same time, they are also conforming to his orthodox doctrines. Athanasius just followed the model of his predecessors and issued ascetic opinions according to what he believes to be true. As he himself writes in a

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<sup>408</sup> *Ad Virgin. Syr.* 3 (*Mus* 41, p.172).

festal letter, 'For as each of the saints has received, that they impart without alteration, for the confirmation of the doctrine of the mysteries...Again we write, again keeping to the apostolic traditions (ἀποστολικὰς παραδόξαις), we remind each other when we come together for prayer.'<sup>409</sup> Nothing is aberrant. To Brakke's proposal of regarding the ascetic teachings as intentional politics, P. Widdicombe queries, 'Was Athanasius quite as self-conscious and systematic in his "politics of asceticism"?'<sup>410</sup> Possibly, they have the function of consolidating the church, but at most it is only a side effect.

Actually, Brakke's proposal is self-contradictory. If Athanasius designed his ascetic program solely for church formation, why did he advocate monasticism and urge his followers to undertake ascetic practices if the monastic movement was regarded as hazardous to this purpose? In the pro-Athanasian *Vita Pachomii*, the anonymous author declares, 'In Egypt and in the Thebaid not many had turned to the monastic life up to the time of the persecutions by Diocletian and Maximian. But, after that, the bishops (οἱ ἐπίσκοποι) led people to God according to the teachings of the apostles (τὴν τῶν ἀποστόλων διδασχὴν), and the repentance of the nations yielded a rich harvest.'<sup>411</sup> Maybe, this description is exaggerated and biased. However, Athanasius' achievement in promoting monasticism is an undeniable fact. Brakke has depended too much on the assumption that Athanasius is a power-hungry politician and has overlooked many positive motives of his ascetic effort. His proposal is unacceptable.<sup>412</sup>

We have now examined both the theology and the asceticism of Athanasius. While the former provided a theoretical base for the latter, the latter actualised the abstract idea of the former in real life situation. In the next chapter, we will turn to the most representative and influential ascetic writing of Athanasius, the *Vita Antonii*. From this hagiography, the ascetic ideal of the bishop may be found. While the teachings in other treatises are generally circumstantial and fragmentary, the model presented in this hagiography is more perfect and complete. The *Vita Antonii* is one of the most important sources for us to understand the spirituality of Athanasius.

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<sup>409</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 24.7 (Cureton, pp.24-25).

<sup>410</sup> P. Widdicombe, Review of Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, *JThS* NS 47 (1996):678-681.

<sup>411</sup> *Vita Pachomii—Graeca* 2 (Athanasakis, p.4).

<sup>412</sup> For discussions of Athanasius' ascetic and monastic effort, see Chapter Four part B.2 of this thesis and Kannengiesser, 'Athanasius of Alexandria and the ascetic movement of his time,' pp.479-492.

### III. SPIRITUALITY IN THE *VITA ANTONII*

In his classic series of *A History of Christian Spirituality*, L. Bouyer claims, 'The *Life of St Antony* is of unparalleled interest in our study. For it is the oldest monastic biography we possess. Its immediate success was considerable: no other work, certainly, has done more to propagate the monastic life.'<sup>1</sup> Although the *Vita Antonii* has been reviewed critically in different directions nowadays, its supreme status in the development of Christian spirituality, especially asceticism, is still unshakeable. When talking about this hagiography,<sup>2</sup> nearly all writers, no matter ancient or modern, acknowledge its great influence in the Christian church. Not long after the publication of the work, Gregory of Nazianzus called it 'a rule for the monastic life (τοῦ μοναδικοῦ βίου νομοθεσίαν) in the form of a narrative (ἐν πλάσματι διηγήσεως).'<sup>3</sup> More than 1500 years later, J. Quasten still commended it as 'the most important document of early monasticism.'<sup>4</sup> Traditionally, the accomplishment of the *V. Ant.* was attributed to two main causes, the unusual personality of the subject Antony and the unique authority of its author Athanasius.<sup>5</sup> However, as time passed, both of these two causes are now being questioned. Is the hagiography really authored by Athanasius? Is the account of the life of Antony authentic? In order to investigate its spiritual message, a deeper review of modern discussions of this important Christian spiritual classic is necessary.

#### A. Different Views of the *Vita Antonii*

In 1985, C. Kannengiesser published a report on the research of Athanasius during the period 1974 to 1984. In the report, he says, 'One of the most promising developments of Athanasian studies during the last ten years belongs to the Coptic setting of Athanasius' pastoral activities.'<sup>6</sup> Because of the translations of old sources, new Coptic studies by different parties and the rigorous exploration of the Nag Hammadi library, a lot of new insights have been put into the study of Athanasius' links with monastic

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<sup>1</sup> Bouyer, *A History of Christian Spirituality*, vol.1, p.307.

<sup>2</sup> My use of the terms 'hagiography' and 'biography' is based on the standard of fourth-century people and is not in the same sense as modern historians. While most modern scholars do not accept miracle as a historical truth, people of Athanasius' time did accept it. For a discussion of the worldviews of ancient people, see Ramsey, *Beginning to Read the Fathers*, pp.26-27.

<sup>3</sup> Gregory, *Oratio* 21.5 (SC 270, p.118).

<sup>4</sup> Quasten, *Patrology*, vol.3, p.39.

<sup>5</sup> For example, Deferrari writes, 'The extraordinary importance of the *Life of Saint Anthony* can be attributed to a number of causes, but chief among them must be reckoned, first, the great holiness and unusual personality of the subject, and, second, the unique authority and influence of the biographer, St. Athanasius, and the veneration in which he was held.' R. J. Deferrari, ed., *Early Christian Biographies*, FC 15 (Washington, 1952), p.127.

<sup>6</sup> Kannengiesser, 'Current Theology—The Athanasian Decade 1974-84: A Bibliographical Report,' p.528.

communities and the towering figures of the Egyptian ascetic heroes. Of course, amongst these studies, the *V. Ant.* is again in the central focus.<sup>7</sup>

## 1. Authorship of the Hagiography

The *Vita Antonii* was attributed to Athanasius in a very early stage. Soon after its publication and transmission, Evagrius of Antioch, to whom Jerome admitted a keen intelligence,<sup>8</sup> translated the work into Latin for those who had no Greek. In this Evagrian version, a heading ‘Athanasius the bishop to the brethren abroad’ (*Athanasius episcopus ad peregrinos fratres*) was preserved.<sup>9</sup> Several years later, in his *De viris inlustribus*, Jerome repeatedly mentioned Athanasius as the author of the *V. Ant.* and specified Evagrius as the translator.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, in 380, seven years after the death of Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus testified in his *Oratio* 21 that Athanasius had compiled the biography of the monk Antony.<sup>11</sup> Besides, the anonymous author of the *Vita Pachomii* also reported that in the *V. Ant.*, Athanasius ‘drew on informed monastic sources (μονάζοντας εἰδότες) and wrote with accuracy (ἀκριβῶς).’<sup>12</sup> Although it was perhaps written as late as 390, this document is of great weight as an independent evidence of the Athanasian authorship of the work. After that, nearly all historians of the early church attributed the *V. Ant.* to Athanasius. These historians included, for example, Rufinus, Palladius, and Socrates.<sup>13</sup>

This Athanasian authorship of the *V. Ant.* was generally taken for granted until H. Weingarten published his famous thesis ‘Der Ursprung des Mönchtums im nachkonstantinischen Zeitalter’ in 1877. In the thesis, Weingarten not only denied the traditional view of the authorship of the *V. Ant.*, but also the historicity of the account.<sup>14</sup> This perspective was later taken and refined by H. M. Gwatkin.<sup>15</sup> However, their arguments and premises are weak and were not able to withstand criticism.<sup>16</sup> In 1886,

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp.528-531.

<sup>8</sup> Hieronymus, *De viris inlustribus* 125 (TU 14.1, p.53).

<sup>9</sup> Evagrius, *S. Athanasii episcopi Alexandrini praefatio* (PG 26, col.837).

<sup>10</sup> Hieronymus, *De viris inlustribus* 87-88, 125 (TU 14.1, pp.44-45, 53).

<sup>11</sup> Gregory, *Oratio* 21.5 (SC 270, p.118).

<sup>12</sup> *Vita Pachomii—Graeca* 99 (Athanasakis, p.140). Besides, the author says, ‘The most holy archbishop Athanasius bears written witness (ἐγγράφως μαρτυρεῖ) about him [Antony] after his death.’ *Vita Pachomii—Graeca* 2 (Athanasakis, p.4).

<sup>13</sup> Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.8 (PL 21, col.478); Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* 8 (Butler, 2:28); Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.21 (PG 67, col.136).

<sup>14</sup> H. Weingarten, ‘Der Ursprung des Mönchtums im nachconstantinischen Zeitalter,’ *ZKG* 1 (1877):545-574; reprinted in *Der Ursprung des Mönchtums im nachconstantinischen Zeitalter*, Gotha, 1877.

<sup>15</sup> H. M. Gwatkin, *Studies of Arianism* (Cambridge, 1882), pp.98ff. See also H. M. Gwatkin, *Studies of Arianism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge, 1900), pp.102ff.

<sup>16</sup> For an account of Weingarten’s and Gwatkin’s arguments and its corresponding refutations, see Robertson, *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius*, pp.190-193.



Weingarten's thesis was convincingly confuted by J. Mayer and A. Eichhorn and was unanimously rejected.<sup>17</sup> Afterwards, the Athanasian authorship of the *V. Ant.* was again taken for granted by most scholars of the early twentieth century such as R. Reitzenstein, K. Holl, K. Heussi, H. Dörries, R. T. Meyer, G. Müller, E. Schwartz and R. C. Gregg.<sup>18</sup> All the patrologies written by O. Bardenhewer, F. Cayre and J. Quasten regard Athanasius as the author of the hagiography.<sup>19</sup> Besides, the authoritative *Clavis Patrum Graecorum* also put the *V. Ant.* in the list of Athanasius' authentic works.<sup>20</sup> It seems that the authorial problem raised by Weingarten was fully settled. Nearly every scholar ascribed the *V. Ant.* to Athanasius as before.<sup>21</sup>

It was the recent study of the Syriac version of the *V. Ant.* that disturbed the harmony again. For various reasons, the Greek version has long been regarded as the original text.<sup>22</sup> Besides this Greek text, two Latin, one Coptic, one Armenian, one Georgian and one Old Slavonic version have been found and edited.<sup>23</sup> Based on the similarity of their content, most scholars agree that all these versions basically originated from the extant Greek. However, along with these different texts, there exists a Syriac version that differs significantly from the others.<sup>24</sup> This Syriac version survives in two recensions, short and long, and in at least fourteen manuscripts.<sup>25</sup> A comparison of the

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<sup>17</sup> J. Mayer, 'Über Echtheit und Glaubwürdigkeit der dem heiligen Athanasius d. Grossen zugeschriebenen *Vita Antonii*,' *Der Katholik* 55 (1886):495-516, 619-636, 56 (1886):72-86, 173-193; A. Eichhorn, 'Athanasii de vita ascetica testimonia collecta,' diss., Halle, 1886.

<sup>18</sup> R. Reitzenstein, *Des Athanasius Werk über das Leben des Antonius: Ein philologischer Beitrag zur Geschichte des Mönchtums*, Philologisch-historische Klasse 8, Heidelberg, 1914; K. Holl, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte*, vol.2, Tübingen, 1928; Heussi, *Der Ursprung des Mönchtums*; Dörries, 'Die *Vita Antonii* als Geschichtsquelle,' pp.357-410; R. T. Meyer, ed. and tr., *St. Athanasius: The Life of Antony*, ACW 10 (Westminster, 1950), p.3; R. T. Meyer, 'Antony of Egypt, St.,' *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol.1 (New York, 1967), pp.594-595; Müller, *Lexicon Athanasianum*; Schwartz, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol.3, p.7; Gregg, *Athanasius: The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, pp.1-26.

<sup>19</sup> Bardenhewer, *Patrology*, p.258; Cayre, *Manual of Patrology and History of Theology*, pp.346-347; Quasten, *Patrology*, vol.3, pp.39-45.

<sup>20</sup> *CPG*, vol.2, no.2101.

<sup>21</sup> Deferrari says, 'Weigarten's attack in 1877 was the last. His theory, fashionable for a time, was completely abandoned within a generation. Today, scholars are practically unanimous in their acceptance of the work as a genuine historical record and as an authentic work of St. Athanasius.' Deferrari, *Early Christian Biographies*, pp.128-129.

<sup>22</sup> For a list of Greek manuscripts, see G. J. M. Bartelink, ed. and tr., *Athanase d'Alexandrie: Vie d'Antoine*, SC 400 (Paris, 1994), pp.79-81.

<sup>23</sup> Besides these versions, there also exists an Arabic and an Ethiopic version which are still unedited. For a survey of the versions, see Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*, pp.127-128.

<sup>24</sup> The Syriac version was first published by P. Bedjan in 1895 and was later translated into English by E. A. W. Budge in 1904. Cf. P. Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum* 5 (Paris and Leipzig, 1895), pp.1-121; and E. A. W. Budge, *The Book of Paradise*, Lady Meux Manuscript 6 (London, 1904), vol.1, pp.1-108; vol.2, pp.1-93. See also the more widely accessible work E. A. W. Budge, *The Paradise of the Holy Fathers*, vol.1 (London, 1907), pp.3-76.

<sup>25</sup> Amongst the fourteen manuscripts, eleven belong to the long and three belong to the short recension. Comparison of the two recensions reveals that the short one is basically an abridgement of the long.



Syriac and the Greek will show that neither of them could be a simple translation of the other. Although the two versions contain the same episodes in the same order, the long Syriac recension is about fifty percent longer than the Greek.<sup>26</sup>

Early in 1894, F. Schulthess has already written a dissertation on the Syriac *V. Ant.* and compared the Greek and Syriac versions as a whole. In the discussion, he left open the question of the authorship of the *V. Ant.* while providing a suggestion that the Syriac version might depend on a more primitive source different from the Greek text.<sup>27</sup> However, this suggestion is too sketchy and selective and was generally not accepted, or even considered, by scholars.<sup>28</sup> It is the publication of the new critical edition of the Syriac *V. Ant.* in 1980 that drew the attention of scholars back onto the issue. In this edition, R. Draguet points out a number of linguistic oddities, such as anomalous word usage and rare constructions, in the Syriac text and claims that these can best be explained by Copticisms. Rather than the extant Greek version, he suggests that the original *V. Ant.* was in the form of a Copticising Greek text which was composed in the bilingual monastic environment of Coptic Egypt shortly after the death of Antony. This hypothetical lost text was then well preserved in the Syriac but completely reworked and abridged in the Greek. With this hypothesis, Draguet deduces that the author of the *V. Ant.* must be a Hellenised Copt and not someone as adept in writing Greek as Athanasius.<sup>29</sup>

Draguet's suggestion resonated with a number of different scholars. After detecting two strata in the Greek *V. Ant.*, M. Tetz argued in 1982 that the present biography was Athanasius' revision, with systematic theological corrections, of an earlier account of Antony composed by Serapion of Thmuis. In this hypothesis, Athanasius is not the author, but a redactor of the hagiography only.<sup>30</sup> Instead of Copticising Greek, T. D. Barnes proposed in 1986 that the original *V. Ant.* was a Coptic text. While the Syriac version reproduced the lost original with reasonable accuracy, the Greek translator systematically made revision.<sup>31</sup> In the article, Barnes not just rejected the possibility that Athanasius was the author of the original, but also refused to accept him as the redactor

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Amongst the eleven manuscripts of the long, seven attribute the *V. Ant.* to Athanasius, one to Jerome and three leave the work anonymous. Cf. R. Draguet, ed., *La vie primitive de S. Antoine conservée en syriaque*, 2 vols, CSCO 417-418 (Louvain, 1980), vol.1, pp.9-18; vol.2, pp.17-24.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. D. B. Brakke, 'The Greek and Syriac Versions of the *Life of Antony*,' *Mus* 107 (1994):30.

<sup>27</sup> F. Schulthess, *Probe einer syrischen Version der Vita St. Antonii*, diss. (Leipzig, 1894), pp.14-25.

<sup>28</sup> Schwartz even rebukes the suggestion and says, 'Nur die platteste Tendenzkritik kann an der Echtheit dieses Werkes zweifeln.' Schwartz, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol.3, p.7 fn.1.

<sup>29</sup> Draguet, *La vie primitive de S. Antoine conservée en syriaque*, vol.2, pp.100-112.

<sup>30</sup> M. Tetz, 'Athanasius und die *Vita Antonii*: Literarische und theologische Relationen,' *ZNW* 73 (1982):1-30.

<sup>31</sup> T. D. Barnes, 'Angel of Light or Mystic Initiate? The Problem of the *Life of Antony*,' *JThS* NS 37 (1986):353-368.

of the Greek version.<sup>32</sup> Besides, Draguet's assumption of the priority of the Syriac version was also accepted by A. Louth<sup>33</sup> and P. Brown.<sup>34</sup>

Convincing refutations of the arguments of Draguet were first given by L. Abramowski in 1988 and R. Lorenz in 1989. By comparing the parallel passages in the Syriac and Greek version of the *V. Ant.*, they both reasserted the traditional view that the Syriac was a revision of the Greek. In their works, they identified six major tendencies in the process of revising the Greek into the Syriac version. Firstly, a tendency to hagiographic embellishment was observed especially in the early chapters of the Syriac version.<sup>35</sup> Secondly, a sense of archaism was introduced to make the narrative appear to have happened long ago.<sup>36</sup> Thirdly, the reality of angels was stressed such that they became the true models of ascetic monks.<sup>37</sup> Fourthly, a strong intention to translate philosophical terminology and ideas into biblical language was noticed.<sup>38</sup> Fifthly, since the Syriac version was prepared for readers who were unfamiliar with Egypt, when dealing with strange materials such as people, places and things of that foreign land, the redactor should either omit or explain them for the readers. Both these phenomena could

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<sup>32</sup> While rejecting the Athanasian authorship with similar reasons as Draguet, Barnes rejects the redactorship and says, 'But it is hard to believe that, if Athanasius had produced VG [the Greek version], he could so totally have effaced himself, or resisted the temptation to rewrite the passage which puts Athanasius and Serapion on the same level [*Life* 91].' Barnes, 'Angel of Light or Mystic Initiate? The Problem of the *Life of Antony*,' p.367. To this argument, Louth comments, 'It is wholly subjective: it depends on a judgement as to what kind of a man Athanasius was.' A. Louth, 'St. Athanasius and the Greek *Life of Antony*,' *JThS* NS 39 (1988):505.

<sup>33</sup> While accepting Barnes' conclusion provisionally, Louth, like Tetz, insists that Athanasius was the redactor of the Greek version. Cf. Louth, 'St. Athanasius and the Greek *Life of Antony*,' pp.504-509.

<sup>34</sup> Brown, *The Body and Society*, p.213 fn.1.

<sup>35</sup> For example, in chapter one, the Greek version portrayed the childhood of Antony as a boy obedient to his mother and father. However, in the Syriac version, he became a 'teacher' of his parents and was honoured by them as an elder. The traditional image of the acetic elder as a wise teacher was projected back into his childhood. Cf. L. Abramowski, 'Vertritt die syrische Fassung die ursprüngliche Gestalt der *Vita Antonii*?' *Mélanges Antoine Guillaumont: Contributions à l'étude des christianismes orientaux*, ed. R. G. Coquin, CO 20 (Genève, 1988), pp.50-52. See also R. Lorenz, 'Die griechische *Vita Antonii* des Athanasius und ihre syrische Fassung,' *ZKG* 100 (1989):81.

<sup>36</sup> For example, the phrase 'who were found at that time' was added to the description of virgins in chap.3, and 'the current assault of the Arians' in chap.82 was revised to 'this trouble of the Arians.' Cf. Abramowski, 'Vertritt die syrische Fassung die ursprüngliche Gestalt der *Vita Antonii*?' p.52, 55; and Lorenz, 'Die griechische *Vita Antonii* des Athanasius und ihre syrische Fassung,' p.81.

<sup>37</sup> For example, in chap.14, the event when Antony came out from his cave was recorded. Instead of describing him as 'having been led into divine mysteries and inspired by God,' the redactor of the Syriac version rewrote it as 'his appearance as that of an angel of light.' Cf. Abramowski, 'Vertritt die syrische Fassung die ursprüngliche Gestalt der *Vita Antonii*?' p.53; and Lorenz, 'Die griechische *Vita Antonii* des Athanasius und ihre syrische Fassung,' p.81.

<sup>38</sup> There are more than 280 biblical citations and allusions in the Syriac version, but fewer than 120 in the Greek. If the priority of the Syriac is to be accepted, the redactor of the Greek would have to delete the majority of the biblical references in the original text. Such practice was totally unacceptable in the fourth-century Christian church. Cf. Abramowski, 'Vertritt die syrische Fassung die ursprüngliche Gestalt der *Vita Antonii*?' pp.53-55. See also Brakke, 'The Greek and Syriac Versions of the *Life of Antony*,' pp.47-49.

be found in the Syriac version.<sup>39</sup> Finally, theological revisions supporting the Antiochene, or Nestorian, position in the Christological controversy in the fourth and fifth centuries were made.<sup>40</sup>

Not long after this, Draguet's theory was further disproved by S. Rubenson and was finally demolished by D. B. Brakke. In 1990, after examining the *Epistulae Antonii* and comparing them with the *V. Ant.*, Rubenson showed that the *V. Ant.* was marked by tensions between Athanasian theology, monastic tradition and hagiographical style.<sup>41</sup> He concluded at the end, 'The basic accord between the theology of the letters and that of the *Vita*, and the shared heritage of Antony and Athanasius, strongly support the Athanasian authorship of the *Vita* and the primacy of the Greek version.'<sup>42</sup> Two years later, Brakke took Draguet's so-called linguistic oddities in the Syriac version and re-examined them one by one. As a result, he found that Draguet had overstated the anomalous character of the Syriac and that any linguistic oddities that did exist could not be explained by Coptic.<sup>43</sup> After reiterating the arguments of Abramowski and Lorenz, he wrote, 'We should assume that it is the extant Greek *Life of Antony* that is the earliest form of the hermit's hagiography.' Then, he concluded, 'There is no reason to remove the Greek *Life* from the corpus of authentic works by Athanasius.'<sup>44</sup> To this stage, the traditional Athanasian authorship of the *V. Ant.* seems to be fully re-established.

Although there are still a few modern scholars like T. D. Barnes who refuse to concede,<sup>45</sup> Athanasius is now generally accepted as the author of Antony's hagiography again. Besides the above four, other modern scholars taking this position include D. W.-H. Arnold,<sup>46</sup> A. Pettersen,<sup>47</sup> G. J. M. Bartelink,<sup>48</sup> F. W. Norris<sup>49</sup> and C. Kannengiesser.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> For example, in chap.47, the identity of 'Bishop Peter' was explained by adding 'of the same Alexandria,' and the names of the Egyptian gods Osiris and Isis were omitted in chap.75. Cf. Abramowski, 'Vertritt die syrische Fassung die ursprüngliche Gestalt der *Vita Antonii*?' p.54. See also Lorenz, 'Die griechische *Vita Antonii* des Athanasius und ihre syrische Fassung,' p.84.

<sup>40</sup> For example, in chap.36, when talking about Mary, the Syriac version omitted the phrase 'the God-bearer' which appeared in the Greek. In the controversy, such *theotokos* Mariology was generally rejected in Antioch. Cf. Abramowski, 'Vertritt die syrische Fassung die ursprüngliche Gestalt der *Vita Antonii*?' pp.54-55.

<sup>41</sup> Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*, pp.132-141, 187. The Antonian authorship of the *Epistulae Antonii* has long been questioned by scholars and was recently defended and affirmed by S. Rubenson. Cf. Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*, pp.35-42, 141-144.

<sup>42</sup> Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*, p.187.

<sup>43</sup> Brakke, 'St. Athanasius and Ascetic Christians in Egypt,' chap.2. The essay was later revised and published in Brakke, 'The Greek and Syriac Versions of the *Life of Antony*,' pp.29-53.

<sup>44</sup> Brakke, 'The Greek and Syriac Versions of the *Life of Antony*,' p.53.

<sup>45</sup> In his recent publication, Barnes still regards the *V. Ant.* as inauthentic. Cf. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, p.240 n.64.

<sup>46</sup> Arnold writes, 'When Athanasius wrote his *Life of Antony* a special point was made to include the Manichaeans with the Arians and the Meletians.' Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, p.69. Athanasian authorship is taken for granted.

Although there are still some minor unsolved problems on this issue,<sup>51</sup> evidences, both internal and external, supporting the Athanasian authorship of the *V. Ant.* are far stronger than any rejecting it. Unless new evidences are found, the Greek version of this spiritual classic ought to be accepted as an authentic work of Athanasius.

## 2. Relationship of Antony and Athanasius

According to the traditional reading of the *V. Ant.*, Athanasius claimed in the prologue to have seen Antony often and to have ‘followed him no short time (ἀκολουθήσας αὐτῷ χρόνον οὐκ ὀλίγον) and poured water on his hands (ἐπιχέων ὕδωρ κατὰ χεῖρας αὐτοῦ).’<sup>52</sup> Just before his death, Antony instructed two of his disciples, probably Amathas and Macarius,<sup>53</sup> to divide his clothing, one sheepskin (μηλωτή) to Athanasius and one to Serapion.<sup>54</sup> With the hints from 2 Kings 2:12-13 and 3:11, Athanasius has been suggested to have had an extraordinarily intimate relationship, like that of Elijah and Elisha, with Antony.<sup>55</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, Jerome and Palladius all mentioned the two names together.<sup>56</sup> O. Bardenhewer even declares firmly about Athanasius, ‘As a youth he was for a considerable period under the direction of the great Saint Anthony, the patriarch of the Cenobites.’<sup>57</sup> Modern scholars holding a similar view include, for example, J. Quasten and C. Kannengiesser.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> When Pettersen discusses the theology of Athanasius, he quotes the *V. Ant.* as his supporting text. The Athanasian authorship is again taken for granted. Cf. Pettersen, *Athanasius*.

<sup>48</sup> Bartelink, *Athanase d’Alexandrie: Vie d’Antoine*, pp.27-35.

<sup>49</sup> F. W. Norris, ‘Antony,’ *EEChr* 1:59-60.

<sup>50</sup> Kannengiesser, ‘Athanasius,’ 1:137-140. Concerning the *V. Ant.*, Kannengiesser says, ‘A recent attempt to deny its Athanasian origin has failed to convince.’ Kannengiesser, ‘Athanasius of Alexandria and the ascetic movement of his time,’ p.491.

<sup>51</sup> One example is the odd reference to the *V. Ant.* in the letter of Serapion. Cf. Serapion, *Epistula ad Discipulos Antonii* 13 (PG 40, col.940). Another example is what T. D. Barnes argues that some ancient Syriac manuscripts do not attribute the *V. Ant.* to Athanasius. While most of them leave it anonymous, one attributes it to Jerome. Cf. Barnes, ‘Angel of Light or Mystic Initiate?’ pp.358-359. However, these problems are trivial. They can at most add a note of doubt in our acceptance of Athanasian authorship.

<sup>52</sup> *V. Ant.* preface (PG 26, col.840). Some manuscripts have deviations in wording. This will be discussed later.

<sup>53</sup> Hieronymus, *Vita Pauli* 1 (PL 23, col.17-18).

<sup>54</sup> *V. Ant.* 91 (SC 400, p.370).

<sup>55</sup> In 2 Kg. 3:11, Elisha was described by an officer of the king of Israel as a man who used to pour water on the hands (LXX, ἐπέχεεν ὕδωρ ἐπὶ χεῖρας) of Elijah. In 2 Kg. 2:12-13, when Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind, he took hold of his own clothes (LXX, τῶν ἱματίων αὐτοῦ) and tore them apart. Elisha picked up the cloak (LXX, τὴν μηλωτὴν) that had fallen from Elijah and went back. This inheritance of clothes is traditionally believed to be a symbol of the transmission of the power and career of the predecessor.

<sup>56</sup> Gregory, *Oratio* 21.5 (SC 270, p.118); Hieronymus, *De viris inlustribus* 87-88, 125 (TU 14.1, pp.44-45, 53); Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* 8 (Butler, 2:28).

<sup>57</sup> Bardenhewer, *Patrology*, p.253.

<sup>58</sup> Quasten, *Patrology*, vol.3, p.20; Kannengiesser, ‘Current Theology—The Athanasian Decade 1974-84: A Bibliographical Report,’ p.529.



As in other areas of Athanasian studies, this traditional view of the intimate relationship between Antony and Athanasius is being challenged. For those who reject the Athanasian authorship of the *V. Ant.*, such as H. Weingarten and T. D. Barnes, such relationship is of course spurned. Even amongst scholars who accept Athanasius as the hagiographer, attacks are also made. In 1980, R. C. Gregg and D. E. Groh first questioned the relationship of Athanasius and Antony and said, 'The nature of the bishop's familiarity with his subject [Antony] is problematic.'<sup>59</sup> They claimed that, the *V. Ant.* was only a polemical weapon for the orthodox camp to undo threatening Arian bids for monastic support.<sup>60</sup> Such critical investigation of Athanasius' relationship with the monks was then followed by C. M. Badger, a student of R. C. Gregg.<sup>61</sup> Gradually, Gregg and Groh's view gained more resonance and support in academic circles. In his book published in 1995, D. B. Brakke even inferred daringly that Athanasius had seen Antony only once.<sup>62</sup> What was the actual relationship between Antony and Athanasius? In order to solve this problem, it is necessary for us to examine their arguments one by one.

#### a) Another version of the prologue

To demolish the traditional view of the intimate relationship of Athanasius and Antony, the phrase 'what I have been able to learn from him, since I followed him no short time and poured water on his hands' (ἃ μαθεῖν ἡδυνήθην παρ' αὐτοῦ ἀκολουθήσας αὐτῷ χρόνον οὐκ ὀλίγον καὶ ἐπιχέων ὕδωρ κατὰ χεῖρας αὐτοῦ) in the prologue of *V. Ant.* must first be considered.<sup>63</sup> With the reading of some other manuscripts, Brakke translated it as 'what I have been able to learn from the one who followed him no short time (παρὰ τοῦ ἀκολουθήσαντος αὐτῷ χρόνον οὐκ ὀλίγον) and poured water on his hands (ἐπιχέαντος ὕδωρ κατὰ χεῖρὸς αὐτοῦ).'<sup>64</sup> Following M. Tetz, Brakke suggests that this unidentified Elisha to Antony's Elijah is Serapion of Thmuis.<sup>65</sup> By quoting K. Heussi's work, he claims that the traditional reading is a corruption in the text.<sup>66</sup> Although both texts have strong manuscript support, it seems that Brakke's reading is more probable. It is hard to imagine who would intentionally revise the traditional reading to the new one, which shows a less close relation between the two. Nevertheless, what does this

<sup>59</sup> Gregg and Groh, *Early Arianism: A View of Salvation*, p.136.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., chap.4.

<sup>61</sup> Badger, 'The New Man Created in God: Christology, Congregation and Asceticism in Athanasius of Alexandria,' pp.211-216.

<sup>62</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, p.205.

<sup>63</sup> *V. Ant.* preface (PG 26, col.840).

<sup>64</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, p.206; *V. Ant.* preface (SC 400, p.128).

<sup>65</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, p.207. See also Tetz, 'Athanasius und die *Vita Antonii*: Literarische und theologische Relationen,' pp.1-30.

<sup>66</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, p.207, fn.17. On this issue, Heussi says, 'Daß dieser Text der ursprüngliche ist, ergibt sich auch aus seiner übereinstimmung mit der Übersetzung des Evagrius.' Heussi, *Der Ursprung des Mönchtums*, pp.82-83.



alternative reading imply? It can only imply that Athanasius was not really a disciple of Antony. Concerning their mutual relationship, it can say no more than that. Indeed, Athanasius has written clearly just before this phrase, ‘for I have seen him often’ (πολλάκις γὰρ αὐτὸν ἑώρακα).<sup>67</sup> Although he was not a disciple of Antony, he seems to have visited him frequently and kept a good relationship with him.

## b) Consultation with some monks

In the prologue, Athanasius declared that he hoped to learn more from certain monks who had been with Antony more frequently so that a fuller narrative might be prepared. However, in order that the hagiography could be sent before the end of good sailing weather, he hastened to complete it. Originally, this can be treated as evidence showing Athanasius’ familiarity with Antony. He could finish the hagiography with his own knowledge. On the contrary, from this desire of consultation from some monks, Gregg and Groh judge that the contact between the bishop and the hermit might be very limited. Such suspicion is heightened by the evidence in the *Vita Pachomii* that, while referring to the *V. Ant.*, it makes no mention of Athanasius’ personal contact with the hermit but reports his use of ‘informed monastic sources’ (μονάζοντας εἰδότας).<sup>68</sup> Such citation of *Vita Pachomii* is questionable. According to its Greek text, the main verb of the nominated sentence is ἔγραψεν. Consistent with its context, what such syntactic structure emphasises is that Athanasius has written the hagiography accurately. The mention of his use of monastic sources in the subordinate clause is to support the word ἀκριβῶς so as to make the hagiography more trustworthy.<sup>69</sup> Concerning the personal contact of Athanasius and Antony, this quotation gives us no direct information. Actually, in another part of the same treatise, the anonymous author writes, ‘The most holy archbishop Athanasius bears written witness (ἐγγράφως μαρτυρεῖ) about him [Antony] after his death.’<sup>70</sup> Rather than drawing information largely from other monks, this sentence suggests that Athanasius himself bore witness about the hermit.

## c) Uniqueness of ‘we passage’

In *V. Ant.* 69-71, an event of Antony’s visitation to Alexandria was recorded. At the end of this visit, Athanasius writes, ‘When he was departing, and we were escorting (προεπέμπομεν) him, as we came (ἐφθάσαμεν) to the gate....’<sup>71</sup> Because in this passage

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<sup>67</sup> *V. Ant.* preface (SC 400, p.128).

<sup>68</sup> Gregg and Groh, *Early Arianism: A View of Salvation*, p.137; *Vita Pachomii—Graeca* 99 (Athanassakis, p.140).

<sup>69</sup> The Greek text reads καὶ οὗτος γὰρ παραλαβὼν μονάζοντας εἰδότας τὰ κατ’ αὐτὸν ἀκριβῶς ἔγραψεν. *Vita Pachomii—Graeca* 99 (Athanassakis, p.140).

<sup>70</sup> *Vita Pachomii—Graeca* 2 (Athanassakis, p.4).

<sup>71</sup> *V. Ant.* 71 (SC 400, p.318).

alone the story was narrated in the first person, R. C. Gregg proposes that 'Athanasius' contact with the monk was less frequent than the introduction of the *Life* might lead a reader to suppose.<sup>72</sup> Brakke even suspects this to be the only contact of the hermit and his hagiographer.<sup>73</sup> However, this is an *argumentum ex silentio*. What we can draw from it cannot exceed its own scope. As the *V. Ant.* is mainly a collection of individual personal events, from the absence of the first person, we can only deduce that Athanasius himself was most probably not present on these occasions. Other aspects of the daily life of the hermit remain unrecorded. No conclusion can be drawn from the text.

#### d) Antony's interaction with Balacius

The incident of Balacius' death was cited both in *Hist. Ar.* 14 and *V. Ant.* 86. However, some details of the story were told differently.<sup>74</sup> In *Hist. Ar.*, Antony's letter was sent to Gregory and passed on to Balacius, who was bitten by his own horse; but, in the *V. Ant.*, the letter was sent directly to Balacius and he was bitten by Nestorius' horse. To these differences, Gregg questions, 'Did Athanasius receive more information about the incident prior to writing the more extended version in the *Life of Antony*?<sup>75</sup> However, is the narrative in the *V. Ant.* really more informed and extended than that in *Hist. Ar.*? A detailed comparison of the two will show that this is not the case. There are some details, especially those related to Gregory, in *Hist. Ar.* that are missing in *V. Ant.*<sup>76</sup> Instead of receiving more information, it is better to explain the differences in terms of selection of materials. In *Hist. Ar.*, what Athanasius wanted to stress is the wickedness of Gregory. So, a detailed discussion was made on the role of Gregory and the story of Balacius' death was simplified. In contrast, what he wished to show in the *V. Ant.* was how Antony's warning against Balacius had come true miraculously. So, while adding many details, such as the gentleness of the horse, on the duke's death, Athanasius avoided the mention of Gregory to reduce confusion. The deviations are explainable.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Gregg, *Athanasius: The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, p.142 n.132.

<sup>73</sup> According to the index to *Ep. Fest.* 10 (SC 317, p.236), the visit took place in the summer of 337 while Athanasius was still in exile. Brakke however accepts that the phrase 'in this (year)' (ⲉⲛ ⲉⲧⲏⲥ) in the index should mean 338 and regards it as the only contact of the two. Cf. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, p.205. For the interpretation of 'in this (year),' see A. Martin, ed., *Histoire 'acéphale' et index syriaque des lettres festales d'Athanasie d'Alexandrie*, SC 317 (Paris, 1985), p.75.

<sup>74</sup> For a detailed account of the difference, see Heussi, *Der Ursprung des Mönchtums*, pp.98-99.

<sup>75</sup> Gregg, *Athanasius: The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, pp.143-144 n.146. See also Gregg and Groh, *Early Arianism: A View of Salvation*, p.156 n.47. Brakke also uses it as evidence to support his claim that Athanasius had seen Antony only once. Cf. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, p.205.

<sup>76</sup> For example, instead of just mentioning that Balacius spat on the letter, *Hist. Ar.* 14 (PG 25, col.708-709) also recorded that it was Gregory who caused Balacius to spit on it.

<sup>77</sup> On this issue, Robertson has provided two explanations: 1) Athanasius in one place told the story inaccurately, and corrected himself in the other; 2) the *Hist. Ar.* was partly written for Athanasius by a

## e) Athanasius' cloak

Besides the account given in the prologue, Athanasius also recorded at the end of *V. Ant.* that, in addition to the sheepskin, the dying Antony had also left to him a cloak (ἱμάτιον) 'which he [Athanasius] gave me new (καινόν), but I have by now worn out (πεπαλαίωται).'<sup>78</sup> This statement suggests that Athanasius must have seen Antony long ago, perhaps before he became a bishop. D. B. Brakke protests that there is no evidence for this.<sup>79</sup> This protest is possibly right. In our extant ancient sources, the only record mentioning the cloak is Jerome's *Vita Pauli*.<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, its historicity is being questioned by scholars. J. N. D. Kelly even says that it is 'certainly a masterpiece of story-telling.'<sup>81</sup> In spite of this, we cannot ignore completely Athanasius' record of the cloak. Many ancient events, such as those appear in *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* and Palladius' *Historia Lausiaca*, are uniquely recorded. Can we reject all their witnesses simply because we have no other evidence about them? If the cloak was the one Antony usually wore, it should have been widely recognisable by the Antonian monks like Serapion. If Athanasius did not possess this cloak, would he tell such a foolish lie that could easily be exposed by so many people? Concerning Brakke's protest, we can at most insert a note of doubt on the account.

## f) Only one mention of Antony

Besides the story of Balacius' death, Athanasius has nowhere else mentioned Antony by name other than in the *V. Ant.* in his extant writings. This has also been used by Brakke as a proof for limited contact between the two.<sup>82</sup> However, this is also an *argumentum ex silentio* and has already been dealt with by scholars early in the controversy on the authorship of the hagiography.<sup>83</sup> If one accepts the Athanasian authorship of the *V. Ant.*, one must also be able to accept this fact without much difficulty. Actually, as L. W. Barnard has noticed, Athanasius did also mention

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secretary. Cf. Robertson, *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius*, p.191. However, in view of the loose attitude of treating history in the patristic period, my explanation seems to be more probable.

<sup>78</sup> *V. Ant.* 91 (SC 400, p.370).

<sup>79</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, p.205.

<sup>80</sup> Here, Jerome recorded a short dialogue between Antony and Paul of Thebes, whom he believed to be the first hermit. After telling Antony that he was going to die, Paul said, 'I pray you, unless it is too great a trouble, bring the cloak which Athanasius the bishop gave you (*pallium quod tibi Athanasius episcopus dedit*), to wrap around my body.' Hieronymus, *Vita Pauli* 12 (PL 23, col.26).

<sup>81</sup> Kelly gives two reasons for this assertion. Firstly, no evidence of Paul of Thebes survives outside the work. Secondly, in contrast to Antony who had shied away from bookish studies, Paul was a monk with a first-class education, like Jerome himself. Cf. J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies* (London, 1975), pp.60-61.

<sup>82</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, p.206.

<sup>83</sup> Robertson, *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius*, pp.191-193; Mayer, 'Über Echtheit und Glaubwürdigkeit der dem heiligen Athanasius d. Grossen zugeschriebenen *Vita Antonii*;' and Eichhorn, 'Athanasii de vita ascetica testimonia collecta.'

Pachomius only once, which may be thought strange in view of the many references in the *Vita Pachomii* to Athanasius' dealings with Pachomius and his followers.<sup>84</sup> What we can deduce here is that, without other evidential support, the single mention of a figure cannot prove anything about the relationship between the two.

From the above discussions, it seems that the arguments querying the close relationship between Athanasius and Antony are all very weak. None of them can be decisive. At most, from the uniqueness of the 'we passage,' one may question the frequency of the encounter of the two fathers. Nothing more can be said. The proposal that Athanasius had seen Antony only once, however, goes too far and is not acceptable. Actually, in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Sozomen has mentioned how Antony supported Athanasius and his Nicene position on three different occasions.<sup>85</sup> In the *Vita Pachomii*, it was recorded that Antony visited the Pachomian monks after the death of their abbot and left a message for Athanasius with a parental tone.<sup>86</sup> Besides, in his letter to the disciples of Antony soon after his death, Serapion of Thmuis also described Antony as an intercessor for the Athanasian party against the Arian persecutions.<sup>87</sup> It seems that all these evidences are in certain extent independent of the *V. Ant.*. If they are genuine, such actions and behaviour of the hermit may point to an unusually close link between the two. Most probably, according to the phrase *πολλάκις γὰρ αὐτὸν ἑώρακα* in the prologue and the evidence of the cloak, Athanasius had already built up a good relationship with Antony before or shortly after he became a bishop. If not often, he at least visited the hermit occasionally. In the Arian controversy, responding to the request of the bishop, Antony came down from the mountain and supported the Athanasian party publicly.<sup>88</sup> Apparently, their interrelation remained good till the death of the hermit. Although the evidences supporting the above deduction are not as strong as that of authorship, this is the most probable inference we can make from our existing information.

### 3. Function of the Hagiography

In his *Patrology*, O. Bardenhewer highly values the *V. Ant.* and says, 'It is an authentic and trustworthy work.'<sup>89</sup> Traditionally, the hagiography is regarded as a reliable

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<sup>84</sup> Barnard, *The Monastic Letters of Saint Athanasius the Great*, pp.xv-xvi. Athanasius' only reference to Pachomius is in *Ad Ors. I* (PG 26, col.977).

<sup>85</sup> Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.17, 2.31, 3.13 (PG 67, col.980, 1024-1025, 1068).

<sup>86</sup> Here, Antony said to the followers of Pachomius, 'And if you go to bishop Athanasius, who is so worthy of the office of bishop, tell him that Antony asks him to take care of the children of the Israelite (τοῖς τέκνοις τοῦ Ἰσραηλῆτου).' *Vita Pachomii—Graeca* 120 (Athanasakis, p.164).

<sup>87</sup> Serapion, *Epistula ad Discipulos Antonii* (PG 40, col.925-942). For detailed arguments for the attribution of the letter to Serapion, see R. Draguet, 'Une lettre de Sérapion de Thmuis aux disciples d'Antoine (AD 356) en version syriaque et arménienne,' *Mus* 64 (1951):4-17.

<sup>88</sup> Index to *Ep. Fest.* 10 (SC 317, p.236).

<sup>89</sup> Bardenhewer, *Patrology*, p.258.



historical record of the deceased Antony. However, it is not universally accepted. As with the authorial problem, the first modern scholar challenging the historicity of Antony is H. Weingarten.<sup>90</sup> Although his thesis was soon refuted by J. Mayer and A. Eichhorn,<sup>91</sup> the influence of his critical attitude towards the hagiography remained. Relating to this problem of historicity, there have been many different views proposed in the twentieth century concerning the function of the treatise in academic circles. According to their characteristics, these different views may be divided into three major groups. As the function of the *V. Ant.* is crucial in our understanding of its spiritual messages, this question must be solved first.

#### a) As an encomium praising the saint

Some scholars regard the *V. Ant.* as an encomium, which aimed at praising the saint with special emphasis on his personal achievements. This view accepts the narratives in the *V. Ant.* as basically authentic, but not as rigorous as modern biography. A typical scholar of this view is R. T. Meyer. In his introduction to the *V. Ant.*, Meyer writes, 'Formally, it may be said, the *Vita* composed by St. Athanasius is an encomium in that it gives us Antony's nationality, parentage, education, and youth, and enumerates his good qualities.'<sup>92</sup> He argues that the *V. Ant.* was written according to a kind of classical Greek literature called 'encomium,' which had its purpose of praising an important figure in public life. By comparing it with the *Agésilas* of Xenophon, Meyer concludes that Athanasius saw Antony as an ideal monk and wished to leave behind a literary monument to perpetuate his memory.<sup>93</sup>

In view of the good relationship between Antony and Athanasius, this is a possible deduction. Besides, this view also matches closely with the strong emphasis on the goodness and achievements of the hermit in the hagiography. However, if this is true, why did Athanasius use twenty-eight chapters to record a long discourse of Antony to the monks which seems to be not so important amongst his personal achievements? And also, why did Athanasius omit the care of Antony to the Pachomian monks as mentioned in the *Vita Pachomii* 120? This is certainly an important exploit of Antony that helped in stabilising Pachomius' monastery after his death. It seems that this view of encomium is probable, but insufficient.

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<sup>90</sup> Weingarten, 'Der Ursprung des Mönchtums im nachkonstantinischen Zeitalter,' pp. 545-574.

<sup>91</sup> Mayer, 'Über Echtheit und Glaubwürdigkeit der dem heiligen Athanasius d. Grossen zugeschriebenen *Vita Antonii*;' and Eichhorn, 'Athanasii de vita ascetica testimonia collecta.'

<sup>92</sup> Meyer, *St. Athanasius: The Life of Antony*, p.11.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. See also E. C. Marchand, *Xenophon, Scripta Minora* (London, 1925), pp.18-19.



## b) As a polemical weapon against the Arians

Some scholars treat the *V. Ant.* as a polemical weapon, which Athanasius employed to fight against the Arians. While assuming a serious superimposition was made on the historical Antony, this view concentrates on how Athanasius forged an anti-Arian image for the hermit. Of course, it tends to deny the good relationship between the two. Typical scholars of this view are R. C. Gregg and D. E. Groh.<sup>94</sup> After reconstructing the theology of the Arians, Gregg and Groh claim that an ideal Arian Christian was a close copy of Christ who was considered the first amongst many brothers. To become like Christ, one must follow Him in being obedient to the Father's will. Such soteriology is closely matched with the general image of Antony as a rigorous seeker of virtue's reward. So, Gregg and Groh deduce that Antony shared the same views as the Arians, and that their views were probably widely accepted by the monks. Because of this, Athanasius composed the hagiography strategically and portrayed the hermit as anti-Arian in order to reduce and counteract the influence of the Arian party on the monastic groups.<sup>95</sup>

This view is imaginative, but unrealistic. As R. P. C. Hanson points out, the Arian Christ is not an ordinary creature but a pre-existent being without human soul. Gregg and Groh's picture of the Arian soteriology is questionable.<sup>96</sup> Besides the *V. Ant.*, there are many ancient sources supporting the anti-Arian attitude of Antony that we cannot ignore. The *Epistulae Antonii*, seven letters attributed to Antony, clearly have an anti-Arian sense.<sup>97</sup> Both Socrates' and Theodoret's *Historia Ecclesiastica* mention Antony in connection with their account of how the monks were persecuted and exiled by the Arians.<sup>98</sup> Besides, as mentioned before, both the anonymous *Vita Pachomii*, Sozomen's *Historia Ecclesiastica* and Serapion's *Epistula ad discipulos Antonii* have elements testifying that the hermit was a supporter of the Athanasian party.<sup>99</sup> Although some of them seem to be relying on the materials in the *V. Ant.*, many of them are independent

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<sup>94</sup> This view is largely followed by one of Gregg's students, C. M. Badger. In his doctoral thesis, Badger argues that the traditional understanding of Athanasius as a great patron of monks was greatly overdrawn. Cf. Badger, 'The New Man Created in God: Christology, Congregation and Asceticism in Athanasius of Alexandria,' part 3.

<sup>95</sup> Gregg and Groh say explicitly that the fashioned desert hero in the treatise was 'the vehicle for orthodoxy's campaign to undo threatening (perhaps successful) Arian bids for monastic support.' Gregg and Groh, *Early Arianism: A View of Salvation*, p.153.

<sup>96</sup> R. P. C. Hanson, 'The Arian Doctrine of the Incarnation,' *AHTR*, pp.181-204; and *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, pp.97-98. Besides, Anatolios has also concluded after serious re-evaluation that the accounts of Gregg and Groh are 'distorted and oversimplified.' Cf. Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought*, p.169.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. D. J. Chitty, ed. and tr., *The Letters of St. Antony*, Kalamazoo, 1977.

<sup>98</sup> Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 4.24 (PG 67, col.524); Theodoret, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 4.18 (PG 82, col.1165).

<sup>99</sup> See part A.2 of this chapter.

sources. Unless all these external evidences are false, which is scarcely possible, Gregg and Groh's deduction cannot be sustained.

### c) As a tool uniting the church

Some scholars have proposed recently that the *V. Ant.* was a tool for achieving the author's own political purposes in his episcopal see. Similar to the above, this view presumes a strategic redaction of historical Antonian sources and rejects the intimate relationship between the hermit and his hagiographer. Rather than just fighting against the Arians, the hagiography also has the function of uniting the monks within the Egyptian church. A typical scholar of this view is D. B. Brakke. Believing that the *V. Ant.* was edited from other sources, scholars have been trying to discover the layers and spot the 'seams' in the hagiography. In 1988, A. Louth first suggested that the beginning of *V. Ant.* 28 was an Athanasian interjection.<sup>100</sup> Following this trend, Brakke proposes that the beginning of *V. Ant.* 65 was also a seam. Here, after a series of miracle stories in chapters 56-64, Athanasius concluded, 'Many monks have told unanimously (συμφώνως) and in like fashion (ὁμαλῶς) about other such things that were done by him. Yet these do not appear so marvellous (θαυμαστὰ) in comparison with other even more amazing things (θαυμασιώτερα μᾶλλον).'<sup>101</sup> Thinking that the themes of the following chapters were more coherent with Athanasius' interest, Brakke proposes that the contents of chapters 65-82 are the farthest from the historical Antony and contain the strongest Athanasian messages.<sup>102</sup> Largely from these chapters, he found elements that could help in the formation of the church.<sup>103</sup> Brakke thus concluded, 'The *Life of Antony* served Athanasius primarily as a tool for achieving political unity within the Egyptian Church.'<sup>104</sup>

However, can such so-called 'seams' really function like this? Nearly every treatise, no matter authorial or editorial, has such ordinary transitional statements. Even the *V. Ant.* itself has some other similar sentences that go unnoticed by Brakke.<sup>105</sup> We

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<sup>100</sup> In the middle of a long discourse to the monks (*V. Ant.* 16-43: SC 400, pp.176-252), Antony said, 'Up to this point I have spoken on this subject only in passing. But now I must not shrink (οὐκ ὀκνητέον) from dealing with it in greater detail (πλεονέκτερον).' *V. Ant.* 28 (SC 400, p.210). Louth suggests that this sentence marked a turn from the description of the power of monastic steadfastness against demonic attacks to the power of Christ's victory and was an interjection. Cf. Louth, 'St. Athanasius and the Greek *Life of Antony*,' pp.507-508.

<sup>101</sup> *V. Ant.* 65 (SC 400, p.304).

<sup>102</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, p.207.

<sup>103</sup> For example, Antony was portrayed as a monk who showed proper obedience to the clergy and kept a healthy distance from the officials of the empire. Cf. *V. Ant.* 67, 81 (SC 400, pp.310-312, 340-344).

<sup>104</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, p.264.

<sup>105</sup> Such as the beginning of *V. Ant.* 83 (SC 400, p.350), 'Such were the words and deeds of Antony. And we must not be incredulous (ἀπιστεῖν) because wonders (θαύματα) of this kind were done by a man.' And also that of *V. Ant.* 89 (SC 400, p.362), 'It is worthwhile for me to recall, and for you to hear, as you wish, what the end of his life (τὸ τέλος αὐτοῦ τοῦ βίου) was like, for even his death has become something imitable (ζηλωτὸν).'

must judge, therefore, that Brakke has gone too far and that his judgement is too subjective. We can only say Athanasius regarded the contents of chapter 65-82 as more wonderful, but we have no evidence to conclude whether they are also Antonian or not. There are numerous quantities of narratives that are obviously irrelevant to church unity in the treatise, such as most miracles and ascetic teachings. We cannot neglect them completely. Actually, Brakke's deduction is based on an assumption that Athanasius is a veteran politician who had only limited contacts with the hermit. He composed the hagiography intentionally to propagate his own political ideas amongst the monks. However, this assumption is highly questionable. Firstly, as discussed above, Antony had a close relationship with Athanasius and was a supporter of the orthodox party. It is improbable, and also not necessary, for the bishop to superimpose a large amount of false expression on it. Secondly, as seen in the *Vita Pachomii* 120, Antony had already been widely known by the eastern monks before his death. Probably, his letters and other sayings had already been circulated between different monastic groups during this time. It would be very stupid and dangerous for Athanasius to assume total ignorance of the monks to their abba and portray another Antony for them. Finally, as mentioned by R. T. Meyer, it is Evagrius' Latin version of the *V. Ant.* that made the hagiography popular in the west.<sup>106</sup> It is hard to imagine that this is also an intentional propagating plan of Athanasius. No matter who the recipients of the hagiography are, eastern or western monks, the view of *V. Ant.* as propaganda is unacceptable.<sup>107</sup>

As seen from the above discussions, all the three modern views on the function of the *V. Ant.* are problematic and cannot stand alone. What is the actual purpose of the composition of the hagiography then? Since this question as we can see is closely related to the historicity of the treatise, it is necessary for us to deal with this problem briefly first. In his *A History of Christian Spirituality*, L. Bouyer says, 'Even if the person of Antony had never existed before the portrait made of him, the type provided by this portrait would none the less have produced innumerable exemplars.'<sup>108</sup> Nowadays, some scholars see the *V. Ant.* as a fictitious myth. They question the historicity of Antony, but recognise the historical influences of the hagiography. For example, in his essay in *Christian Spirituality*, Gribomont introduces Antony under a title 'The Myth of Anthony.' Following the exploration of R. Reitzenstein, he claims that some details in the *V. Ant.* were borrowed from the *Vita Pythagorae*, which was conceived by the Neoplatonists Porphyry and Iamblichus. He then deduces that this was the reason why

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<sup>106</sup> Meyer, *St. Athanasius: The Life of Antony*, p.14.

<sup>107</sup> From the heading of the *V. Ant.* (PG 26, col.837), the hagiography was addressed to 'the brethren abroad' (*peregrinos fratres*). Although this term most probably refer to western monks, the possibility of eastern monks of districts other than Egypt still exists.

<sup>108</sup> Bouyer, *A History of Christian Spirituality*, vol.1, p.307.

Athanasius emphasised philosophical themes, such as the freely chosen poverty and psychological stability, of Antony.<sup>109</sup> Because of the extensive historical evidences about the hermit, the treatise can hardly be a pure myth.<sup>110</sup> In short, although the historical Antony may not be totally the same as the character portrayed by Athanasius, there must have been a monk Antony existing in history. Truly, besides *Vita Pythagorae*, evidence has been gathered by scholars, which shows that Athanasius was familiar with and dependent on classical literature, such as Philostratus' *Vita Apollonii Tyanae*<sup>111</sup> and Porphyry's *Vita Plotini*.<sup>112</sup> However, what we can draw from them does not force us to reject the historicity of the hagiography entirely, while acknowledging Athanasius' willingness to employ some features of the classical biographies of his time in his portrait of Antony.<sup>113</sup>

Besides the *V. Ant.*, there are many ancient references to Antony's existence. Comparisons of these sources with the hagiography have shown that the narratives in the *V. Ant.* are largely trustworthy. Amongst these Antonian sources, the most integral and important one is the *Epistulae Antonii*.<sup>114</sup> After a series of careful comparisons of the hagiography and the letters, S. Rubenson concludes that the two works are in general consistent and shared a common Platonic philosophical and Origenist theological background with only two major narrative differences.<sup>115</sup> Firstly, while both works agree

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<sup>109</sup> J. Gribomont, 'Monasticism and Asceticism: Eastern Christianity,' *CSp* 1:92-93; Reitzenstein, *Des Athanasius Werk über das Leben des Antonius*. Another good example of this view is the book edited by P. Walter. All essays in it are divided into four groups with headings 'L'archétype Antonin,' 'Racines helléniques du mythe Antonin,' 'Métamorphoses médiévales du mythe Antonin' and 'L'imaginaire mythique de saint Antoine.' Cf. P. Walter, ed., *Saint Antoine entre mythe et légende*, Grenoble, 1996.

<sup>110</sup> Besides the *V. Ant.*, other ancient works referring to Antony include *Epistulae Antonii*; *Apophthegmata Patrum*; *Vita Pachomii*; *Epistula Ammonis*; *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*; Serapion, *Epistula ad Discipulos Antonii*; Hieronymus, *Vita Pauli*, *Vita Hilarionis*, *Epistula ad Rufinum*, *Epistula ad Castricianum*, *De viris illustribus*; Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica*; Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca*; Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica*; Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica*; and Theodoret, *Historia Ecclesiastica*.

<sup>111</sup> K. Holl, *Die schriftstellerische Form des griechischen Heiligenlebens*, Tübingen, 1928.

<sup>112</sup> J. List, *Das Antoniusleben des hl. Athanasius des Grossen*, Athens, 1931.

<sup>113</sup> As Quasten says, 'It would be difficult to trace the literary influence in detail, although there cannot be any doubt that the ancient classical model of the hero's as well as the newer type of *Vita* of the sage served as inspiration for Athanasius. But it remains his great achievement that he recasted these inherited expressions of popular ideals in the Christian mould and disclosed the same heroism in the imitator of Christ aided by the power of grace. Thus he created a new type of biography that was to serve as a model for all subsequent Greek and Latin hagiography.' Quasten, *Patrology*, vol.3, p.43.

<sup>114</sup> It has been suggested that the *Apophthegmata Patrum* was the best Antonian reference, which presented an accurate picture of the historical Antony. Cf. Dörries, 'Die *Vita Antonii* als Geschichtsquelle,' pp.145-244. However, the collections are late and repeatedly revised compilations. Although over a thousand of the apophthegmata can be considered authentic, its historicity does not rest with the collections but with individual sayings only. For a discussion of the formation of the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, see D. Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (New York and Oxford, 1993), chap.3.

<sup>115</sup> In the conclusion, Rubenson has stated three points on the differences of the two works. Concerning the third one, he says, 'It has the express purpose to present the model for Christian living. While the author of the letters exhorts his disciples to strive towards a deeper understanding of his words, the author of the



that Antony was anti-Arian, the *V. Ant.* has superimposed an emphasis on Christ as the divine actor in man on the image of Antony. Secondly, the *V. Ant.* presupposes the complete victory of Christianity over paganism and the subsequent rejection of the Greek philosophical heritage. While the *Epistulae Antonii* sees the quest of the philosophers and that of the Christian monks as almost identical, the Antony of the *V. Ant.* is taught by God alone, stubbornly opposed to the philosophers and their education and teaching.<sup>116</sup> As the effect of this second difference may be counteracted by the fact that another important ancient Antonian source *Apophthegmata Patrum* holds the same view as the *V. Ant.* on this aspect,<sup>117</sup> only the first difference above is significant. The content of the hagiography is essentially consistent with other contemporary references to Antony.

Although there is more to be learned in the comparison of the *V. Ant.* with other contemporary references,<sup>118</sup> the treatise is on a whole a faithful report of the life of the historical Antony according to the standard of fourth-century people.<sup>119</sup> Here, it should be noted that as A. Robertson says, 'If Athanasius wrote the *Vita*, it does not follow that all its less edifying details are true, nor that its portraiture is free from subjectivity.'<sup>120</sup> Although the account is constrained by the historical facts about Antony, its representation may in certain extent be Athanasian. Through selection and arrangement of materials, different emphases, and subjective explanations, the author transmits his own message through it. Obviously, the emphasis on Christ as the divine actor in man is an example of such Athanasian effort.

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hagiography exhorts them to emulate the ideal presented.' Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*, p.187. Clearly, this difference is mainly a result of different literary forms, one is a hagiography and the other is letters. What we can count as narrative difference are the first two only.

<sup>116</sup> Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*, pp.132-141, 187. In the letters, we see no manifest sign of any dependence on the *V. Ant.*

<sup>117</sup> Even after the study of Rubenson, the *V. Ant.* and the *Apophthegmata Patrum* are still the most complete and representative literary sources of the early monks. Their importance is undeniable. Cf. G. Gould, 'Recent work on Monastic Origins: A Consideration of Questions Raised by Samuel Rubenson's *The Letters of St. Antony*,' *StP* 25 (1993):405-416. In the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, the fathers are generally simple and uneducated. They reject worldly education. For the education of the desert monks, see Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, chap.2. When comparing the *Apophthegmata Patrum* and the *V. Ant.*, Rubenson says, 'Common to both these sources is the image of Antony as a simple, uneducated, even illiterate, man.' S. Rubenson, 'Christian Asceticism and the Emergence of Monastic Tradition,' *Asc*, p.51.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. M. A. Williams, 'The *Life of Antony* and the Domestication of Charismatic Wisdom,' *Charisma and Sacred Biography*, ed. M. A. Williams (Chambersbury, 1982), pp.23-40.

<sup>119</sup> According to the modern standard, many narratives in the *V. Ant.*, such as the miracles, cannot be counted as a faithful report of historical events. However, this is not the case for fourth-century people. On dealing with Athanasius' treatment of Antonian sources, we cannot use modern criteria to judge his authorial motive. For the meanings of miracles for ancient Christians, see B. Ward, "'Signs and Wonders" Miracles in the Desert Tradition,' *StP* 17 (1982):539-542.

<sup>120</sup> Robertson, *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius*, p.193.



Now, we may return to the question about the function of the hagiography. In the prologue of the treatise, Athanasius has already written clearly his purpose of composition. On the request of certain foreign monks, he wrote the hagiography for them so that they might learn how to walk on the ascetic way by the imitation of the hermit.<sup>121</sup> This purpose was repeated at the end of the treatise.<sup>122</sup> If the hagiography is not a fictitious myth as some modern scholars suggest, I see no reason for rejecting the purpose the author himself stated in the prologue. Although in the process of composition, Athanasius seems to have selected and emphasised different themes subjectively, the treatise is in general, from the eyes of fourth-century people, historically trustworthy. Responding to the request of certain foreign monks, Athanasius wrote the career of his intimate abba for their imitation. So, he mentioned in detail all those things related to this purpose: what Antony experienced, what he did and what he said in the ascetic way. Basically, it is a record of the spiritual journey to God of an ideal monk. Because of the special emphasis of Athanasius and the personal character of Antony, it has many other functions. These include, of course, praising the hermit, promoting some ascetic practices, attacking Arians, uniting the monks to the church and persuading pagans to believe Christ. However, all these are only side effects or auxiliary functions of the hagiography and do not reflect its 'primary' intent of composition.

## B. Spiritual Messages of the *Vita Antonii*

The concept of ascendant journey and spiritual advancement is one of the most central themes in the patristic teachings, especially for the Greek fathers. As discussed before, this concept was rooted in the Christian Scriptures and was developed in the early church. In Alexandria, both Clement and Origen had long discussion on spiritual journey.<sup>123</sup> With strong emphasis on the full divinity of the Son, Athanasius follows the Scriptures and his predecessors on the doctrine of spiritual advancement and suggests similarly that it is through Christ that human beings might be exalted to heaven by grace.<sup>124</sup> It seems that at the time when Antony died the concept of spiritual advancement had already been highly developed in the Christian church. It is under this circumstance that Athanasius composed the *V. Ant.* and portrayed a model of spiritual advancement for his readers.

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<sup>121</sup> Here, Athanasius writes, 'Since you have asked me about the career of the blessed Antony (τῆς πολιτείας τοῦ μακαρίου Ἀντωνίου), hoping to learn how he began the discipline, who he was before this, and what sort of death he experienced, and if the things said concerning him are true—so that you also might lead yourselves in imitation of him (ἵνα καὶ πρὸς τὸν ἐκείνου ζῆλον ἑαυτοὺς ἀγάγητε)—I received your directive with ready good will.' *V. Ant.* prologue (SC 400, p.126).

<sup>122</sup> *V. Ant.* 93 (SC 400, pp.372-376).

<sup>123</sup> See Chapter One part B.2.a of this thesis.

<sup>124</sup> *Or. Ar.* 1.41-43 (PG 26, col.96-101).

## 1. Main Theme of the *Vita Antonii*—A Model of Spiritual Advancement

Antony of Egypt was born around 251,<sup>125</sup> probably in Coma.<sup>126</sup> Concerning the character of this hermit, different ancient materials have been preserved. In the seven letters attributed to Antony, he is revealed as a teacher of knowledge who urged his student to know oneself.<sup>127</sup> In the sayings of the desert fathers, Antony is regarded as a leading abbot who taught the practice of monastic life for the monks to follow.<sup>128</sup> In the biography of Pachomius, while portraying Pachomius as the founder of coenobitism, Antony is reported as a representative of anchoritism.<sup>129</sup> In his letter to two of the disciples of Antony, Serapion of Thmuis pictured the hermit as a spiritual patron whose prayers preserved the Egyptian Church from the wrath of God.<sup>130</sup> Although all these treatises emphasise the role of Antony differently, their views are not mutually exclusive. Positively, they supplement each other and contribute each its own part in the reconstruction of the history of the hermit.

Amongst the ancient references to Antony, the status of the *V. Ant.* is unique. It is the most extensive work on the life of the hermit. While having nearly all the elements and themes of the above ancient materials, it has its own special stress. As discussed in the previous section, the *V. Ant.* is chiefly a record of the spiritual journey of an ideal monk who consecrated himself to the service of God. The main theme is *the spiritual journey of the man of God*. Amongst different terms describing the way to God, the one Athanasius used most often in this treatise is 'the way of virtue' (ἡ τῆς ἀρετῆς ὁδός), which emerges five times in total.<sup>131</sup> In the hagiography, he narrated the whole life of the hermit, from his childhood to his death, in order that his readers might imitate and follow him. According to the length in the treatise, the topics Athanasius discussed most are the process of spiritual advancement and the characteristics of the perfect monk.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> This date is calculated from the death of Antony. He died around 356, just before the composition of the hagiography. According to *V. Ant.* 89 (SC 400, p.362), he was nearly 105 years old at that time. So, he was probably born around 251. This view is accepted by most scholars, such as R. T. Meyer, L. Bouyer, J. Quasten, G. Rowell and F. W. Norris. Cf. Meyer, 'Antony of Egypt, St.,' p.594; Bouyer, *A History of Christian Spirituality*, vol.1, p.308; Quasten, *Patrology*, vol.3, p.148; G. Rowell, 'Antony of Egypt, St.,' *DCS*, p.18; and Norris, 'Antony,' 1:59.

<sup>126</sup> Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.13 (PG 67, col.896).

<sup>127</sup> *Epistulae Antonii* 3-4 (PG 40, col.988-994). Rubenson says, 'The key to the understanding of the letters is the repeated exhortation "know thyself," and the view that salvation is the return of man to his original and spiritual nature.' Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*, p.185.

<sup>128</sup> *Apophthegmata Patrum* (PG 65, col.72-440). Whenever Antony is mentioned with other abbots in the collections, his name always appears first.

<sup>129</sup> *Vita Pachomii—Graeca* 120 (Athanasakis, p.162).

<sup>130</sup> Serapion, *Epistula ad Discipulos Antonii* 5, 7-8 (PG 40, col.929-932, 932-933).

<sup>131</sup> *V. Ant.* 3, 7, 20, 26, 93 (SC 400, p.136, 154, 186, 208, 376).

<sup>132</sup> According to the nature of the content, the *V. Ant.* may be divided into four parts: 1) the birth and beginning of Antony (*V. Ant.* 1-2: SC 400, pp.130-134); 2) the process of spiritual advancement of Antony

According to the hagiography, Antony was an Egyptian by race. He was raised in an economically comfortable Christian family and did not take to school.<sup>133</sup> When he was about twenty years old, his parents died and left a younger sister with him. On hearing the message in Matthew 19:21 in church, he sold all his possessions and donated them to the poor.<sup>134</sup> After entrusting his sister to a community of pious virgins, he devoted himself to a religious life and lived amongst local solitaries, from whom he first learned asceticism. About 286, Antony went off in solitude to the 'outer mountain' (ἔξω ὄρος), where he was said to have undergone a series of temptations by the devil.<sup>135</sup> Here, he attracted a number of disciples. Not long after 306, he left his community of hermits.<sup>136</sup> Having travelled for some days through the desert towards the Red Sea, he found his 'inner mountain' (ἑσω ὄρος) and settled there.<sup>137</sup>

The rest of the treatise deals with the special characteristics of the perfect monk. Under the portraiture of Athanasius, after several decades of discipline, Antony became a man with all kinds of goodness. Having love, he sympathised and prayed for those who suffered. Having spiritual power, he healed the afflicted and cast out demons. Having loyalty to the church, he felt no shame at bowing the head to the bishops and priests. Having wisdom, he debated with philosophers and defended the faith in Christ. Having righteousness, he supported the persecuted and accused the wicked. When he felt his end drawing near, he took two companions and gave his final testament to them. In 356, Antony died at the age of about 105 years old and was buried, by his own choice, in a place unknown to others.<sup>138</sup>

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(*V. Ant.* 3-55: SC 400, pp.134-286); 3) the characteristics of the advanced Antony (*V. Ant.* 56-88: SC 400, pp.286-362); and 4) the death and ending of Antony (*V. Ant.* 89-94: SC 400, 362-376).

<sup>133</sup> The Antony in the *V. Ant.* spoke Coptic and never learned Greek. So, in later years, he had to communicate with Greek philosophers through an interpreter. Cf. *V. Ant.* 72 (SC 400, p.320).

<sup>134</sup> *V. Ant.* 2 (SC 400, p.132).

<sup>135</sup> Athanasius writes, 'He was about thirty-five years old (τριάκοντα καὶ πέντε ἐτῶν) at that time.' *V. Ant.* 10 (SC 400, p.164). Regarding certain chronological difficulties, notably the question whether the time he spent in the tomb and that in the desert fort are concurrent or not, see L. V. Hertling, *Antonius der Einsiedler* (Innsbruck, 1929), pp.30-34. Traditionally, this 'outer mountain' is said to be at Pispis, which is situated on the east bank of the Nile, about fifty miles south of Memphis. Cf. Meyer, *St. Athanasius: The Life of Antony*, p.110 n.52.

<sup>136</sup> Concerning the period Antony spent in the outer mountain, Athanasius records, 'Nearly twenty years (ἑἴκοσι ἐγγύς ἔτη διετελέσεν) he spent in this manner pursuing the ascetic life by himself.' *V. Ant.* 14 (SC 400, p.172). Allowing a few years for Antony to organise his disciples into a community, the *ODCC* put the date about 310. Cf. 'Antony, St. of Egypt,' *ODCC*, p.80.

<sup>137</sup> *V. Ant.* 1-55 (SC 400, pp.130-286). Traditionally, the inner mountain is called Dêr Mar Antonios, approximately 100 miles south-east of Cairo, 75 miles east of the Nile, and 20 miles west of the Red Sea. See P. F. Anson, *The Call of the Desert* (London, 1973), p.15f.

<sup>138</sup> *V. Ant.* 56-94 (SC 400, pp.286-376). Traditionally, it is believed that the relics of Antony were found in 561 and were translated to Alexandria. Much later, translations were claimed by Constantinople and by La Motte, where the Order of Hospitallers of Saint Antony was founded. Cf. D. H. Farmer, ed., 'Antony of Egypt,' *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (Oxford, 1978), p.20.

Based on the main theme of spiritual journey, the whole hagiography was constructed in an earth-to-heaven framework. Through daily ascetic discipline, Antony gradually ascended from earth to heaven and became a perfect monk. As seen from the treatise, this object of striving was clear for Antony. The kingdom of heaven (ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν) was always set before him as the final end to be reached.<sup>139</sup> Besides this vertical dimension, it has been suggested that there is another horizontal dimension from the settled land to the desert. According to this view, since, in primitive monasticism, the desert (ἡ ἐρημία) was generally considered as the dwelling place of the demons, the monk's advance into the desert was an assault on the devil's territory.<sup>140</sup> As, in the hagiography, Antony moved deeper and deeper into the desert, this attack on the demons should be a main program of his ascetic life.<sup>141</sup> However, according to *V. Ant.* 49, it is because the hermit was disturbed by many people that he decided to move to the inner mountain.<sup>142</sup> Throughout the whole treatise, no such emphasis of the monk's intention to strike the devil by advancing into the desert can be observed.<sup>143</sup> Perhaps, it was one of Antony's reasons for progressing into the wilderness, but, surely, it was not what Athanasius wanted to stress.

What precisely then is advancing in the spiritual journey? The word Athanasius used most for such progression is προκοπή, or its verbal form προκόπτειν. Concerning the nature of the journey, the passage explaining Antony's ascetic effort at the beginning of the treatise is especially noteworthy. Here, the hermit said, 'The mind of the soul (τῆς ψυχῆς τὸν νοῦν) is strong when the pleasures of the body (αἱ τοῦ σώματος ἡδοναί) are weakened.'<sup>144</sup> Based on this, he came to a 'wonderful' (παράδοξος) conclusion, 'Neither

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<sup>139</sup> *V. Ant.* 20 (SC 400, pp.186-188). Reitzenstein has brought out the dynamic conversions in the ascetic program of Antony. After converting from ordinary life to coenobitic life, he advanced more and more to anchoritism until this anchoritism flowered in his way to heaven. Everything tends to go continuously beyond what has been achieved. Cf. Reitzenstein, *Des Athanasius Werk über das Leben des Antonius*, pp.11ff. Clebsch called this pattern 'the ladderlike quality of the saintly life.' W. A. Clebsch, Preface to *Athanasius: The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, ed. R. C. Gregg, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York, 1980), p.xv.

<sup>140</sup> Heussi has proposed that if a monk buried himself in the desert, it was with the intention of fighting against the devil, and for the reason that solitude seemed to be his usual dwelling place. Cf. Heussi, *Der Ursprung des Mönchtums*, p.111. However, on the contrary, some scholars, such as P. F. Anson, argued that, for ancient people, the desert was actually the dwelling place of God. Cf. Anson, *The Call of the Desert*, p.2.

<sup>141</sup> Cf. Bouyer, *A History of Christian Spirituality*, vol.1, p.312; Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, pp.217-218.

<sup>142</sup> Here, Athanasius writes, 'But when he saw that he was disturbed by many people (ὄχλούμενον ὑπὸ πολλῶν) and was not allowed to retire as he intended and wished...he considered carefully and struck out, departing into the upper Thebaid, in the direction of people who did not know him (πρὸς τοὺς ἀγνοοῦντας αὐτόν).' *V. Ant.* 49 (SC 400, p.266).

<sup>143</sup> According to *V. Ant.* 13 (SC 400, pp.168-170), the desert was seen as the demons' place as well. However, Athanasius has never said that it was the reason of Antony's advancement into the desert.

<sup>144</sup> *V. Ant.* 7 (SC 400, p.152).



the way of virtue nor separation from the world for its sake ought to be measured by time (χρόνῳ), but by desire (πόθῳ) and purposefulness (προαιρέσει).’ For this target, Antony day by day put greater exertion (πόνον) for advancement (προκοπήν).<sup>145</sup> From this passage, four important points may be observed. Firstly, same as Athanasius’ other writings, the way to God revealed in the hagiography is a continuous journey. It does not have clear stages like that of Origen. Secondly, reflecting Athanasius’ doctrine of creation, the goodness and existence of men are unstable. Having the added grace, men should fix their minds on God so as to keep the goodness. The firmness of human will is crucial here. Thirdly, echoing the concept about the two poles of men’s spiritual way, godly passions and bodily desires, what are truly increasing on the journey are one’s aspiration and eagerness to denounce the world and to approach God. Finally, advancement is always accompanied by exertion. The internal passions of the soul and external ascetic efforts always go together. Again, this is a concept completely consistent with general spiritual teachings of the bishop.

Although Antony seems to have been quite perfect from the beginning, there was also advancement in his spiritual journey. For example, while donating his possessions to the poor, he kept a few things at the beginning. However, later he gave the remaining possessions also to the needy.<sup>146</sup> At first, he started ascetic disciplines in his own village. After a period of time, he went out to the tombs and deserted fortress. At last, he moved to the inner mountain farther away from the cultivated village.<sup>147</sup> Concerning the two key elements of advancement, desire and purposefulness, the progress is also explicit. At the beginning when the devil whispered to him many things like the remembrance of his wealth, the guardianship of his sister, the various pleasures of food, and the difficulty of virtue, Antony raised in his mind a great dust cloud of considerations (κονιοπτὸν λογισμῶν).<sup>148</sup> Clearly, he was still struggling and his mind was not firm enough. After a series of arduous battles with demons in the tomb, he went forth still more enthusiastically (μᾶλλον προθυμότερος) in his devotion to God. At this stage, he is reported to have passed large amount of gold without turning.<sup>149</sup> After nearly twenty years of discipline in the fortress, Antony remained excellent in his spiritual condition. He demonstrated to everyone that his passion to God was both strong and firm.<sup>150</sup> Such stability of soul and firmness of will can be seen throughout the rest of his life.

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<sup>145</sup> *V. Ant.* 7 (SC 400, p.154).

<sup>146</sup> *V. Ant.* 2, 3 (SC 400, p.134).

<sup>147</sup> *V. Ant.* 3, 8, 12, 49-50 (SC 400, p.136, 156, 168, 268-270).

<sup>148</sup> *V. Ant.* 5 (SC 400, p.142).

<sup>149</sup> *V. Ant.* 11-12 (SC 400, pp.164-168).

<sup>150</sup> *V. Ant.* 14 (SC 400, pp.172-174).



In the vertical ascending model, Athanasius presents the devil (διάβολος) and his demons (δαίμονες) as in control of the air (ὁ ἀήρ) and trying to prevent people from ascending to heaven. As Rousseau says, ‘Where the *Life* differs markedly from other early texts is in its emphasis on demons.’<sup>151</sup> Such emphasis on demons is a unique feature of the hagiography. In the Old Testament, the word אֱדֻמִּי ‘adversary’ is used to denote the devil who accuses men before God.<sup>152</sup> Concerning the origin of the devil and his demons, Jewish writers suggest that they resulted from the fall of certain angels and their intercourse of with women.<sup>153</sup> Because of their jealousy over the place of humans in creation, these angels rebelled against God and men.<sup>154</sup> Here, אֱדֻמִּי is the prince of the rebellious angels and all demons are subject to him until the messianic age.<sup>155</sup> He tempts men with seven spirits, which are the lusts of human beings.<sup>156</sup> Paganism is actually a worship of demons.<sup>157</sup> In the New Testament, the devil is mentioned as ὁ διάβολος, ὁ Σατανᾶς or Βεελζεβούλ, whereas the demons are named as οἱ δαίμονες or τὰ πνεύματα τὰ πονηρὰ. These demons possessed people, but Jesus and his disciples cast them out with the power from God.<sup>158</sup> Here, the devil is said to be ‘the god of this age’ (ὁ θεὸς τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου) who blinds the minds of unbelievers. He is ‘the ruler of the kingdom of the air’ (ὁ ἄρχων τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ ἀέρος) who is at work in those who are disobedient.<sup>159</sup> His power of death was destroyed by the crucifixion of Jesus.<sup>160</sup> According to Revelation, the devil will eventually be bound for a thousand years and afterwards be thrown into the lake of burning sulphur.<sup>161</sup>

Because of the identification of pagan gods with demons, following Psalm 96:5 in the Septuagint<sup>162</sup> and the teachings of the apostle Paul, Christian apologists and early fathers often attribute all of pagan religion to the worship of demons.<sup>163</sup> Following the

<sup>151</sup> P. Rousseau, ‘The Desert Fathers, Antony and Pachomius,’ *The Study of Spirituality*, ed. C. Jones et al. (London, 1986), pp. 125-126.

<sup>152</sup> Job 1:6-12, 2:1-7; Zech. 3:1-2.

<sup>153</sup> *Jubilees* 4:22 (Sparks, p.23); *1 Enoch* 6-8, 15-16 (Sparks, pp.188-192, 203-205); *2 Enoch* 7:4 (Sparks, p.335).

<sup>154</sup> *Life of Adam and Eve* 12-17 (Sparks, pp.149-151).

<sup>155</sup> *Jubilees* 10:8, 23:29 (Sparks, p.41, 76).

<sup>156</sup> *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs: Reuben* 2-3 (Sparks, pp.516-517), *Benjamin* 7 (Sparks, p.597).

<sup>157</sup> *Jubilees* 1:11, 22:17 (Sparks, p.11, 72).

<sup>158</sup> E.g. Mt. 12:43-45; Lk. 8:26-39; Acts 5:16.

<sup>159</sup> 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2. Besides Paul, John also calls the devil ‘the ruler of this world’ (ὁ ἄρχων τοῦ κόσμου τούτου). Cf. Jn. 12:31, 14:30, 16:11.

<sup>160</sup> Heb. 2:14-15.

<sup>161</sup> Rev. 12:9-10, 20:2,10. For a discussion of the Scriptural teachings about the devil, see H. Bietenhard, ‘δαίμόνιον,’ *NIDNTT* 1:450-453; and J. L. Garrett, ‘Satan,’ *EEChr* 2:1037-1039.

<sup>162</sup> Here, the Hebrew bible reads כִּי כָל-אֱלֹהֵי הָעַמִּים אֱלֹהִים יִהְיֶה שָׁמַיִם עֲשָׂה, and the Greek translation is ὅτι πάντες οἱ θεοὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν δαιμόνια ὁ δὲ κύριος τοὺς οὐρανοὺς ἐποίησεν. The word אֱלֹהִים ‘worthless idols’ is translated as δαιμόνια ‘demons.’

<sup>163</sup> Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 26-27 (CSEL 2, pp.38-40).

teachings of the Scriptures, Ignatius of Antioch warns of the ‘snares’ (ἐνέδραι) and ‘cruel tortures’ (κακαὶ κολάσεις) of the devil. To prevent the devil from capturing one’s life, Christians should never anoint themselves with the stench of his teaching.<sup>164</sup> Justin Martyr suggests that the incarnation of Christ has already initiated the overthrow of the demons. In the crucifixion, the power of the devil was broken decisively.<sup>165</sup> However, only with the parousia will the devil and his demons be totally destroyed. In the meantime, they will incite the authorities to persecute Christians.<sup>166</sup> Evangelisation is the means to demolish the realm of evil.<sup>167</sup> Together with Tatian, he believes that the demons will deceive people wherever possible.<sup>168</sup> According to Irenaeus, the devil is a fallen angel who envied human beings.<sup>169</sup> He lied in claiming the kingdoms of the earth. In the last days, the Antichrist will come in the power of the devil.<sup>170</sup> Hippolytus points out that within the Christian church the most serious demonic attack is causing heresy.<sup>171</sup> For Clement of Alexandria, the devil is a thief (λῃστής) and robber (κλέπτης).<sup>172</sup> Since Christ has vanquished the devil and enslaved death, Christians may turn away from evil.<sup>173</sup>

Amongst the church fathers, the influence of Origen on fourth-century Egyptian thought is predominant. For him, in the beginning all created beings including angels and demons were equal. Their present position corresponds to the degree of their infidelity. Those who had very greatly sinned became demons; those who had sinned less, human souls; and those who had sinned the least, angels and archangels. In this hierarchy of spiritual creatures, while the angels aid the souls, the demons hinder them. The latter act upon men by two methods: complete possession of the mind and hostile suggestion of evil thoughts and dark passions.<sup>174</sup> Besides, they are also ‘the cause of plagues, barrenness, tempests, or similar calamities’ (ἐνεργούντων λοιμοὺς ἢ ἀφορίας ἢ δυσπλοίας ἢ τι τῶν παραπλησίων) in the world.<sup>175</sup> They entice human beings to sin. Those who are overcome by them will become their slave and may even worse take on the image of

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<sup>164</sup> Ignatius, *Epistula ad Ephesium* 17.1 (Lightfoot & Harmer, p.146); *Epistula ad Trallium* 8 (Lightfoot & Harmer, p.162); *Epistula ad Romam* 5.3 (Lightfoot & Harmer, p.172).

<sup>165</sup> Justin, *Dialogus cum Tryphone Iudaeo* 45, 49, 131 (PTS 47, pp.145-146, 151-152, 296-298).

<sup>166</sup> Justin, *1 Apology* 5, 10, 45, 52, 57 (PTS 38, pp.38-39, 46, 96, 104-105, 113).

<sup>167</sup> Justin, *Dialogus cum Tryphone Iudaeo* 83 (PTS 47, p.214).

<sup>168</sup> Justin, *1 Apology* 5 (PTS 38, pp.38-39); Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos* 14 (PTS 43, p.31).

<sup>169</sup> Irenaeus, *Demonstratio Praedicationis Apostolicae* 16-17 (ACW 16, pp.57-58).

<sup>170</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 5.24.1, 5.25.1 (PG 7, col.1186, 1189).

<sup>171</sup> Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium Haeresium* 6.7.1, 6.39.1, 6.41.1 (PTS 25, p.212, 256, 258).

<sup>172</sup> Clement, *Stromata* 1.17.84 (GCS 15, p.54).

<sup>173</sup> Clement, *Cohortatio ad Gentes* 9.82-83, 11.111 (GCS 12, pp.62-63, 78-79). For a fuller discussion of demonology in the patristic period, see E. Ferguson, *Demonology of the Early Christian World* (New York, 1984), chap.4.

<sup>174</sup> Origen, *De Principiis* 1.6.2, 1.8.1, 3.3.4 (GCS 22, pp.81-82, 96, 260-261).

<sup>175</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.31 (GCS 2, p.82); see also *Contra Celsum* 8.31 (GCS 3, pp.246-247).

demon.<sup>176</sup> The head of the demons is the devil. Instead of envy for human beings, his fall is due to his own pride.<sup>177</sup> As a trick, Jesus was delivered as ransom to the devil, whose realm was then overturned via the resurrection.<sup>178</sup> Origen sees the Christian life as a struggle against the demonic attacks, which is possible only with divine help.<sup>179</sup> While baptism is a share of Christ's victory, martyrdom is a further means for the Christians to share in the victory over demons. At the parousia, all evils will be overcome.<sup>180</sup>

With such a background, the demonology of the *V. Ant.* was formed. Similar to Origen, the hagiography suggests that demons were originally made good. They fell from the heavenly wisdom (ἐκπεσόντες ἀπὸ τῆς οὐρανίου φρονήσεως) and thereafter wandered around the earth (λοιπὸν περὶ τὴν γῆν καλινδούμενοι). Envious of Christians, they move all things in their desire to frustrate the believer's journey up to heaven.<sup>181</sup> In order to keep men from God, the devil and his demons try every effort to attack Christians, especially those who are labouring cheerfully (φιλοπονοῦντας) and advancing (προκόποντας). Different from the Origenist categorisation of complete possession and hostile suggestion, the Athanasian demonic attacks include only internal thoughts and external phantasms. As the way of virtue is measured by firmness on the ascending journey, the function of these attacks is obviously to distract one's mind from the goal. In his discourse to the monks, Antony summarised them systematically. The demons would first tempt Christians with internal 'evil thoughts' (ῥυπαροὶ λογισμοὶ). After several failures, the demons would try external assault by 'phantasms' (φαντασίαι). They would transform themselves and imitate women (γυναικάς), beasts (θηρία), reptiles (ἑρπετὰ), huge bodies (μεγέθη σωμάτων) and thousands of soldiers (πλῆθος στρατιωτῶν).<sup>182</sup> Both these two modes of attack may be found in the early stage of Antony's ascetic career. Here, the devil first tempted him with internal thoughts, such as sex, food and wealth, and then attacked him with external phantasms, such as a woman, a black boy and wild beasts.<sup>183</sup> For Antony, on the way to heaven, these trials seemed to be unavoidable.<sup>184</sup>

<sup>176</sup> Origen, *De Principiis* 3.2.1, 3.3.3 (GCS 22, pp.244-246, 259-260).

<sup>177</sup> Origen, *De Principiis* 1.5.4-5 (GCS 22, pp.73-78).

<sup>178</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum* 7.17, 8.54 (GCS 3, pp.168-169, 270-271).

<sup>179</sup> Origen, *De Principiis* 3.2.5 (GCS 22, pp.252-254).

<sup>180</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum* 8.44, 8.72 (GCS 3, pp.258-259, 289). For the demonology of Origen, see also J. Daniélou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture, A History of Early Christian Doctrine before the Council of Nicaea 2*, tr. J. A. Baker (London, 1973), pp.434-441.

<sup>181</sup> *V. Ant.* 22 (SC 400, pp.194-196).

<sup>182</sup> *V. Ant.* 23 (SC 400, p.198).

<sup>183</sup> *V. Ant.* 5-13 (SC 400, pp.142-172). For discussions of the demonology in the *V. Ant.*, see W. Schneemelcher, 'Das Kreuz Christi und die Dämonen: Bemerkungen zur *Vita Antonii* der Athanasius,' *Pietas: Festschrift für Bernhard Kötting*, ed. E. Dassmann and K. S. Frank (Münster, 1980), pp.381-392; N. H. Baynes, 'St. Antony and the Demons,' *JEA* 40 (1954):7-10; and J. Daniélou, 'Les Démons de l'air dans la *Vie d'Antoine*,' *AME*, pp.136-147.

Concerning the hindering of the devil and the demons, Antony's two marvellous visions have provided the best illustrations. In the first vision, Athanasius describes the demonic power as some loathsome (πικροῦς) and terrible (δεινούς) beings standing in the air. Once, around three o'clock in the afternoon,<sup>185</sup> Antony suddenly fell into a state of ecstasy and was guided aloft by certain beings. In the air (ἀέρι), he was temporarily blocked by the demonic power. After showing that he had been living uprightly and all his previous sin had been erased by the Lord, a clear way (ὁδός) to heaven was opened up to him.<sup>186</sup> The second vision is very similar, except that the demonic power is pictured as a single huge figure. This time, Antony was called to get up at night. When he went out, he saw a towering monster (ὁ μακρὸς) stretching out his hands (τὰς χεῖρας) and certain beings ascending as if they had wings (ἐπτερωμένους). While some of the latter were stopped by the former, others flew over it. Afterwards, Antony was given an explanation that the demonic power could only seize those who had yielded to him, but not those who had not.<sup>187</sup> In the hagiography, a real example of such successful ascension is given in the story on the death of the monk Amun.<sup>188</sup> Echoing Athanasius' doctrinal treatises, the *V. Ant.* regards the devil and the demons as some power blocking the way to God.<sup>189</sup> Although in Greek thought, demons remained capable of being either good or bad, Athanasius adopted traditional Christian belief and consistently considered them to be evil.<sup>190</sup> Rather than requiring some special knowledge to get past the heavenly gatekeepers like Egyptian Gnosticism,<sup>191</sup> what Christians needed, as shown in the visions, were the grace of Christ and the virtuous lives of men. According to the hagiography, having seen the visions and as being reminded, Antony made more effort daily to advance to what lies ahead (προκόπτειν τοῖς ἔμπροσθεν).<sup>192</sup> Again, we see that the ascending way to heaven is closely linked to human exertion.

In spite of the devil's hindering, because of the salvation of Christ, men could still be able to ascend into heaven through ascetic disciplines. In the *V. Ant.*, consistent with Athanasius' other writings, the victory of Christ on the cross is essential for the exaltation of men. Besides opening up a way to heaven by overthrowing the prince of the power of

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<sup>184</sup> As Ammonas, a successor of Antony, said, 'For Abba Antony used to say to us, "No man will be able to enter into the kingdom of God without trials."' *Ammonii Eremitae Epistulae* 9 (PO 10, p.591).

<sup>185</sup> Literally, it reads 'the ninth hour' (τὴν ἐνάτην ὥραν). According to ancient practice, both day and night are divided into twelve hours. So, the ninth hour was about three o'clock in the afternoon.

<sup>186</sup> *V. Ant.* 65 (SC 400, pp.304-306).

<sup>187</sup> *V. Ant.* 66 (SC 400, p.308).

<sup>188</sup> *V. Ant.* 60 (SC 400, p.294).

<sup>189</sup> See Chapter One part B of this thesis.

<sup>190</sup> Cf. E. Ferguson, 'Demons,' *EEChr* 1:325-327.

<sup>191</sup> According to Epiphanius, some fourth-century Egyptian Gnostic Christians learned passwords to get past such heavenly gatekeepers from an ancient work called the *Gospel of Philip*. Cf. Epiphanius, *Panarion* 26.13 (PG 41, col.352).

<sup>192</sup> *V. Ant.* 66 (SC 400, p.310).



the air, Christ and His cross also help Christians in four ways. Firstly, He has erased our sin. This point may be seen clearly in the first vision of Antony. When the demons in the air sought an accounting of Antony's life, his guides said, 'The Lord has wiped clean the items dating from his birth (τὰ μὲν τῆς γενέσεως ὁ Κύριος ἀπήλειπεν), but from the time he become a monk, and devoted himself to God, you can take an account.' As a result, the demons lost their power on Antony.<sup>193</sup> Secondly, Christ has rendered the devil weak. In the hagiography, a story of Antony's encounter with Satan is included. When Antony asked Satan why he torments the Christians, he replied, 'I am not the one tormenting them, but they disturb themselves, for I have become weak (ἐγὼ γὰρ ἀσθενὴς γέγονα).' <sup>194</sup> As the devil had already been weakened by Christ's victory on the cross, he could only draw power from Christians' own weaknesses.<sup>195</sup> This explains why the hagiography has forsaken the Origenist concept of complete demonic possession. Thirdly, the Lord has bestowed on men a special gift of discernment of spirits (χάρισμα διακρίσεως πνευμάτων).<sup>196</sup> In his long discourse, Antony taught the knowledge of demons in detail and urged the monks to devote themselves more on prayer (εὐχῆς) and ascetic discipline (ἀσκήσεώς) so that they might receive the gift of discerning spirits through the Holy Spirit.<sup>197</sup> After the discourse, Athanasius writes, 'And all were persuaded to hate the demonic conniving (τῆς δαιμονικῆς ἐπιβουλῆς), marvelling at the grace given by the Lord to Antony for the discerning of spirits (τὴν διάκρισιν τῶν πνευμάτων).' <sup>198</sup> Finally, the Son was working with His Christians. Many times when Antony defeated the demons, he asserted that he was indeed helped by the Lord.<sup>199</sup> Besides, he also asked the monks to bear this in mind so that they might be able to deal with the demons and live a better ascetic life.<sup>200</sup> Actually, according to the sayings of Antony, even the sign of the cross (τὸ σημεῖον τοῦ σταυροῦ) might help in demolishing the phantasms of the demons.<sup>201</sup>

<sup>193</sup> *V. Ant.* 65 (SC 400, pp.304-306). The same theme appears also in *Or. Ar.* 2.69 (PG 26, col.293).

<sup>194</sup> *V. Ant.* 41 (SC 400, p.246). See also similar declaration in *De Incarn.* 52 (Thomson, p.264).

<sup>195</sup> Brakke suggests that the chief of these weaknesses was the fear of death. Cf. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, pp.221-226.

<sup>196</sup> As Peterson observes, the discernment of spirits here has to do principally with the ability to recognise and dispel the various demons and their chief, not between good and evil spirits. Cf. R. M. Peterson, "The Gift of Discerning Spirits" in the *Vita Antonii* 16-44,' *StP* 17 (1982):525-526.

<sup>197</sup> *V. Ant.* 22 (SC 400, p.196).

<sup>198</sup> *V. Ant.* 44 (SC 400, p.254). Such emphasis on discerning spirits echoes with what Athanasius says in *Ad Aeg. Lib.* 1 (PG 25, col.540).

<sup>199</sup> Athanasius writes in *V. Ant.* 5 (SC 400, pp.144-146), 'Working with him [Antony] was the Lord (συνήργει ὁ Κύριος αὐτῷ).' Similar declarations may be found in every chapter of *V. Ant.* 6-10 (SC 400, pp.146-164). According to the theology of Athanasius, such divine helps are very probably come from the indwelling Spirit of God.

<sup>200</sup> Here, Antony said, 'And let us consider in our soul that the Lord is with us (λογιζώμεθα τῇ ψυχῇ ὅτι Κύριος μεθ' ἡμῶν ἐστίν)...Let us likewise always understand and take it to heart that while the Lord is with us, the enemies will do nothing to us (ὅντος τοῦ Κυρίου μεθ' ἡμῶν, οὐδὲν ἡμῖν οἱ ἐχθροὶ ποιήσουσιν).' *V. Ant.* 42 (SC 400, p.248). See also *V. Ant.* 19 (SC 400, p.184).

<sup>201</sup> *V. Ant.* 23 (SC 400, p.198).



What precisely is the relationship between asceticism and spiritual advancement in the *V. Ant.*? Like Athanasius' other spiritual treatises, the hagiography conceives them as one single journey. In the preface, the author gives a term 'asceticism according to virtue' (τῇ κατ' ἀρετὴν ἀσκήσει).<sup>202</sup> This echoes the concept that asceticism is itself a synonym of virtue. For this reason, having decided to walk on the way of virtue, Antony devoted all the desire (ὅλον τὸν πόθον) and all the energy (πᾶσαν τὴν σπουδὴν) for exertion of asceticism (τὸν τόνον τῆς ἀσκήσεως).<sup>203</sup> To hinder his spiritual advancement, the devil and his demons tried every effort to lead him away from asceticism (αὐτὸν ἀπὸ τῆς ἀσκήσεως καταγαγεῖν).<sup>204</sup> For the same reason, he exhorted others repeatedly to persist daily (καθ' ἡμέραν) in ascetic life (τῇ ἀσκήσει).<sup>205</sup> Having been encouraged by him, the audiences became a multitude of ascetics (πλῆθος ἀσκητῶν). All of them aim at virtue (ἀρετὴν).<sup>206</sup> Since the two ways are overlapped, in addition to desire and purposefulness, spiritual advancement also involves progression of the intensity of ascetic discipline. Athanasius has not explained in detail how much the intensity increased, but phrases like 'intensified his asceticism' (ἐπέτεινε τὴν ἄσκησιν) and 'subjected himself to an even greater and more strenuous asceticism' (καὶ ἀσκήσει πολλῇ καὶ συντονωτέρᾳ ἐκέχρητο) appear everywhere.<sup>207</sup> At the end of the treatise, Antony was greatly praised for his lifelong zeal for asceticism (τὴν προθυμίαν τῆς ἀσκήσεως).<sup>208</sup> Having persevered in asceticism until old age (ἕως γήρους ἀσκητῆς διαμείνας), the soul of Amun was finally led up into the heaven.<sup>209</sup> The progress of asceticism, the advancement of virtue, and the ascension of the soul in human will are primarily the same spiritual journey. Everything is coherent with Athanasius' general ascetic teachings.

Besides bringing about spiritual advancement, on the way to God, asceticism according to the hagiography has two more functions. Firstly, it can help to oppose the demonic attacks. Since the demons were weak, they could only draw power from one's bodily weakness. Through asceticism, Christians may mortify the body and keep it under subjection.<sup>210</sup> Secondly, as mentioned before, asceticism is needed for one to receive through the Spirit the gift of discerning spirits. Having possessed such power through asceticism, Antony knew and taught others how to defeat the devil and his demons.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> *V. Ant.* preface (SC 400, p.126).

<sup>203</sup> *V. Ant.* 3 (SC 400, pp.136-138).

<sup>204</sup> *V. Ant.* 5 (SC 400, p.142).

<sup>205</sup> *V. Ant.* 18 (SC 400, p.184). Similar exhortations appear also in *V. Ant.* 15, 19, 27 (SC 400, p.176, 184, 210).

<sup>206</sup> *V. Ant.* 44 (SC 400, p.254).

<sup>207</sup> *V. Ant.* 45, 47 (SC 400, p.256, 262).

<sup>208</sup> *V. Ant.* 93 (SC 400, p.372).

<sup>209</sup> *V. Ant.* 60 (SC 400, p.294).

<sup>210</sup> *V. Ant.* 7, 30 (SC 400, p.150, 218).

<sup>211</sup> *V. Ant.* 88 (SC 400, p.360).

With the above worldviews as background, Athanasius recorded Antony's journey to God for the monks to imitate. Being a teaching of the ideal Christian life in a narrative form, the requirements and conditions for the monks to ascend into heaven are the most central. The *V. Ant.* contains all the essential elements in Athanasius' teachings on spiritual advancement. As discussed before, Athanasius asserts that on the way to God what Christians should do is *contemplate God with a pure soul through virtuous life*.<sup>212</sup>

#### a) Contemplation of God (θεωρία Θεοῦ)

Throughout the whole hagiography, words with the same root as θεωρία appear eighteen times in total.<sup>213</sup> Such contemplation as mentioned before involves inward and upward intellectual movement of the soul. It includes active meditation of divine reality through the divine knowledge remaining in the soul, the harmony of the universe, the Scriptures, Christian doctrines, and models of the saints, and passive waiting for heavenly visions. In Athanasius' anthropology, men's conception of reality and their idea of God were distorted in the fall. Although the incarnation of the Λόγος has revealed the true image of God on earth, human beings still need to maintain and deepen their knowledge of God by contemplating the divine works.<sup>214</sup> For Athanasius, the best means to achieve this is the Scriptures (αἱ γραφαί).<sup>215</sup> Such emphasis on the Scriptures was actualised in the life of Antony. As W. A. Clebsch observes, Antony was eminently convertible.<sup>216</sup> He was highly ready to be converted by the living Word and the written words of God. His journey to God began with a conversion by a verse in Mathew, 19:21.<sup>217</sup> Because of the messages in the Scriptures, he donated all his belongings to the needy and walked on the way of asceticism.<sup>218</sup> For the same reason, he practised the discipline intensively and defeated the demons.<sup>219</sup> In the hagiography, the Scriptures are quoted directly or indirectly more than a hundred times.<sup>220</sup> In his discourse to the monks, Antony himself confessed, 'The Scriptures are sufficient for instruction (ικανὰς πρὸς

<sup>212</sup> See Chapter One part B.2 of this thesis.

<sup>213</sup> The verb θεωρέω appears 12 times, noun θεωρία 5 times, and θεωρημα 1 time. Cf. Bartelink, *Athanase d'Alexandrie: Vie d'Antoine*, p.405.

<sup>214</sup> For the relationship between the anthropology of the *V. Ant.* and other writings of Athanasius, see Roldanus, *Le Christ et l'homme dans le théologie d'Athanase d'Alexandrie*, pp.286-348.

<sup>215</sup> See Chapter One part B.2.b.i of this thesis.

<sup>216</sup> Clebsch, Preface to *Athanasius: The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, pp.xiv-xv.

<sup>217</sup> *V. Ant.* 2 (SC 400, p.132).

<sup>218</sup> *V. Ant.* 2-3 (SC 400, pp.132-136).

<sup>219</sup> On this point, Athanasius writes, 'From the Scriptures (ἐκ τῶν γραφῶν) Antony learned that the treacheries of the enemy (τάς μεθοδείας τοῦ ἐχθροῦ) are numerous, and he practised the discipline with intensity.' *V. Ant.* 7 (SC 400, p.150).

<sup>220</sup> According to their critical notes for the *V. Ant.*, Meyer related the hagiography with the Scriptures 136 times and Gregg related the two 112 times. Cf. Meyer, *St. Athanasius: The Life of Antony*, pp.106-136; Gregg, *Athanasius: The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, pp.134-144.

διδασκαλίαν).<sup>221</sup> Throughout his life, he used the Scriptures as his own guide on the way to God and referred to them frequently. So, concerning the hagiography, A. Meredith concludes, ‘Antony is portrayed as under the influence and pattern of the norm of scripture.’<sup>222</sup> Different from that of Origen, the Antonian scriptural contemplation does not have a sense of seeking deeper meaning of a text. Being unlettered, Antony normally just memorised by heart some biblical verses and rethought about them so that he might know how to relate them to spiritual reality and apply them practically.

For Athanasius, another way of acquiring the knowledge of God is from the human soul. In *C. Gent.*, Athanasius explains, ‘So since we have faith (τὴν πίστιν) and the kingdom of God (τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ Θεοῦ) within us (ἐν ἑαυτοῖς), we can quickly come to contemplate (θεωρῆσαι) and apprehend (νοῆσαι) the King of all, the saving Word of the Father.’<sup>223</sup> In Athanasius’ theology, ‘faith’ (πίστις) and our concept of God are closely linked together. While it is based on one’s knowledge of God, faith can conversely be used to contemplate the divine matters so as to fasten our original concept of God. In the *V. Ant.*, a similar Athanasian conception on faith is revealed. It does not just involve trust and confidence, but also religious conviction on Christian doctrine. On this base, Antony said that faith in our Lord (ἡ εἰς τὸν Κύριον ἡμῶν πίστις) is for us a seal (σφραγὶς) and a wall (τεῖχος) into safety (εἰς ἀσφάλειαν).<sup>224</sup> As S. Rubenson observes, ‘Antony of the *Vita* was an ardent antagonist of philosophical reasoning, a man to whom knowledge (γνώσις) was faith (πίστις).’<sup>225</sup> Besides the Scriptures, faith is another important element in the spiritual journey of Antony. In his early ascetic discipline, he frequently used faith to conquer the devil and his demons.<sup>226</sup> To the two types of demonic attacks, internal thoughts and external phantasms, Antony’s suggested solutions were ‘by prayers and fasting and by faith in the Lord’ (εὐχαῖς γὰρ καὶ νηστεύαις καὶ τῇ εἰς τὸν Κύριον πίστει) and ‘with faith and the sign of the cross’ (τῇ πίστει καὶ τῷ σημείῳ τοῦ σταυροῦ) respectively. Only faith was included in both of them.<sup>227</sup> Parallel with an upright life, faith

<sup>221</sup> *V. Ant.* 16 (SC 400, p.178).

<sup>222</sup> A. Meredith, ‘Asceticism—Christian and Greek,’ *JThS* NS 27 (1976):316.

<sup>223</sup> *C. Gent.* 30 (Thomson, p.82).

<sup>224</sup> *V. Ant.* 9 (SC 400, p.162).

<sup>225</sup> Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*, p.141. After comparing the *V. Ant.* and the *Epistulae Antonii*, Rubenson concludes, ‘In both the letters and the *Vita* the possibility of true knowledge lies in the direct relation between God and man through the spiritual part of his soul.’ Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*, p.133.

<sup>226</sup> For example, in the first encounter of the devil with Antony, Athanasius says that the devil ‘was being thrown for a fall by the sturdiness of this contestant, and being overturned by his great faith (ἀνατρεπόμενόν τε τῇ πίστει) and falling over Antony’s constant prayers.’ *V. Ant.* 5 (SC 400, p.142).

<sup>227</sup> *V. Ant.* 23 (SC 400, p.198).

is for Antony a great weapon (μέγα ὄπλον) against the evil power.<sup>228</sup> Concerning the function of faith in the hagiography, T. Vivian says, 'The journey home, to God, is difficult; that is one of the great truths that the *Life of Antony* will always offer. The road is long, the way mined with temptation and traps; but faith is a sure guide and, with hard work and perseverance (always important to early monasticism), faith will lead the faithful through.'<sup>229</sup>

Of course, amongst different ways of contemplating God, the most direct and effective one is through contemplative prayer. As K. Ware observes, for the church fathers, the spiritual journey might often be divided into two stages: the active life and the contemplative life. The active life, which will be discussed later, means ascetic effort to acquire virtue and to master the passions, whereas the contemplative life signifies inner prayer and the vision of God.<sup>230</sup> In the very beginning, having learned that it is necessary to pray unceasingly in private, Antony has already started to pray incessantly in private (ἰδίαν προσεύχεσθαι ἀδιαλείπτως).<sup>231</sup> Concerning how to achieve this incessant prayer, the fathers had different suggestions. B. Ramsey has summarised them into four: by the observance of set hours during the day, by considering all good actions as prayer, by the practice of the prayer of the heart and by the equation of desire with prayer.<sup>232</sup> Most probably, according to the general practice of the desert fathers, what Antony used was the third one. He prayed and contemplated the divine by heart constantly.<sup>233</sup> So, when discussing the incessant prayer in the *V. Ant.*, M. J. Marx simply equates it as keeping one's mind and heart in the contemplation of God without much explanation.<sup>234</sup> For Antony, prayer is very important. He used prayers to strengthen his spiritual power, to defeat the demons and to help others.<sup>235</sup> Since he entered into ascetic life, Antony has already observed 'the graciousness (τὸ χαρίεν) of one, the eagerness for prayers (τὸ πρὸς τὰς εὐχὰς σύντονον) in another.'<sup>236</sup> Whenever the monks came to him, he unfailingly asked them to pray constantly.<sup>237</sup> After long years of discipline, as Marx describes,

<sup>228</sup> Talking about demonic attacks, Antony said, 'a great weapon against them is an upright life (βίος ὀρθός) and faith in God (ἡ πρὸς θεὸν πίστις).' *V. Ant.* 30 (SC 400, p.218).

<sup>229</sup> T. Vivian, ed. and tr., *The Coptic Life of Antony* (San Francisco and London, 1995), p.23.

<sup>230</sup> K. Ware, 'Ways of Prayer and Contemplation,' *CSp* 1:396-397.

<sup>231</sup> *V. Ant.* 3 (SC 400, p.138).

<sup>232</sup> Ramsey, *Beginning to Read the Fathers*, pp.164-172.

<sup>233</sup> As Ware observes, the desert fathers usually prayed with 'monologic prayer' by repeating and reciting again and again the Psalms and other texts from the Scriptures that they knew by heart. Cf. Ware, 'Ways of Prayer and Contemplation,' p.404.

<sup>234</sup> M. J. Marx, 'Incessant Prayer in the *Vita Antonii*,' *AME*, pp.120-121.

<sup>235</sup> Antony used, or taught others to use, prayers to seek the gift of discerning spirits (*V. Ant.* 22: SC 400, p.196), to remove evil thoughts (*V. Ant.* 23: SC 400, p.198), to combat the demons (*V. Ant.* 5, 9, 51: SC 400, pp.142-144, 158, 274), to heal the sick (*V. Ant.* 57, 58, 61, 84: SC 400, p.288, 290, 298, 352) and to exorcise the evil spirits for the demonised (*V. Ant.* 64: SC 400, p.302).

<sup>236</sup> *V. Ant.* 4 (SC 400, p.140).

<sup>237</sup> *V. Ant.* 55 (SC 400, p.282).



Antony has prepared himself for intimate and habitual converse with God. 'Contemplation of the divine' has become Antony's great joy.<sup>238</sup>

Amongst the contemplative activities of Antony, divine vision is a dominant one. When fighting the demons in the deserted fortress, he was supported by the visions from above. These visions not only brought much relief from his travails, but also prepared him for greater zeal.<sup>239</sup> In the long discourse to the monks, Antony taught the audiences how to distinguish holy and evil visions. A divine vision comes so quietly and gently that immediately joy, gladness and courage will arise in the soul. The thoughts of the soul remain unruffled and undisturbed so that, shining brightly, it contemplates by itself those who appear.<sup>240</sup> In contrast, the demonic assault and appearance is something troubling. From this come immediately terror of soul, confusion and disorder of thoughts.<sup>241</sup> Frequently while sitting or walking with those who visited him, Antony suddenly became dumb and saw a vision (θεωρίαν).<sup>242</sup> He rejoiced in such contemplation of divine realities (τῇ τῶν θείων θεωρίᾳ).<sup>243</sup> What is revealed in the visions is numerous. It covers for example direct encounters with God,<sup>244</sup> disclosures of spiritual realities,<sup>245</sup> treacheries of the demons,<sup>246</sup> destiny of the church,<sup>247</sup> foreknowledge of oneself,<sup>248</sup> and things taking place far away.<sup>249</sup> With the same function as God's general revelation through the Scriptures and Christian faith, personal divine visions cause one to know and love more on heavenly realities and thus guide him to God.

Why is the contemplation of God so important? In the hagiography, the devil and his demons were described as deceitful beings. They used every effort to hide the spiritual realities so that people might fall into their traps. Once such divine knowledge was made known, the obstacles that the devil put on the way to heaven might be removed. So, after Antony's long discourse to the monks, they were all benefited. While some of them increased their love of virtue (ὁ ἔρως τῆς ἀρετῆς), others have either overcome their carelessness (ἡ ὀλιγωρία) or curbed their own self-conceit (ἡ οἷσις). All of them were persuaded to despise the snares of the devil (τῆς δαιμονικῆς ἐπιβουλῆς).<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Marx, 'Incessant Prayer in the *Vita Antonii*,' p.120.

<sup>239</sup> *V. Ant.* 13 (SC 400, p.170).

<sup>240</sup> *V. Ant.* 35 (SC 400, p.232).

<sup>241</sup> *V. Ant.* 36 (SC 400, pp.232-234).

<sup>242</sup> *V. Ant.* 82 (SC 400, p.344).

<sup>243</sup> *V. Ant.* 84 (SC 400, p.352).

<sup>244</sup> E.g. *V. Ant.* 10 (SC 400, pp.162-164).

<sup>245</sup> E.g. *V. Ant.* 60 (SC 400, pp.294-298).

<sup>246</sup> E.g. *V. Ant.* 65-66 (SC 400, pp.304-310).

<sup>247</sup> E.g. *V. Ant.* 82 (SC 400, pp.346-348).

<sup>248</sup> E.g. *V. Ant.* 62, 89 (SC 400, p.300, 362).

<sup>249</sup> E.g. *V. Ant.* 59 (SC 400, pp.292-294).

<sup>250</sup> *V. Ant.* 44 (SC 400, pp.252-254).

Actually, for Antony, the contemplation of God, and the knowledge of the spiritual realities, is itself a powerful weapon for removing the attacks of the devil.<sup>251</sup>

## b) Pure Soul (καθαρά ψυχή)

In the *V. Ant.*, words with the same root as καθαρά appear sixteen times.<sup>252</sup> After twenty years of discipline in a deserted fortress, the state of Antony's soul remained pure (καθαρόν). Here, the hagiographer explains, 'For it was not constricted by grief, nor relaxed by pleasure, nor affected by either laughter or dejection.'<sup>253</sup> Like many earlier fathers, a pure soul is always impassible to worldly things. Just like a mirror, purity is necessary for accurate reflection of divine image. Any impurity or stain remaining in the soul will distort the reflected image and obstruct divine contemplation. In contrast, a pure soul can bring about accurate understanding of spiritual events. On this base, Antony said, 'When a soul is pure in every way (καθαρεύσασα ψυχή πανταχόθεν) and in its natural state (κατὰ φύσιν ἐστῶσα), it is able, having become clear-sighted, to see more and farther than the demons, since it has the Lord who reveals things to it.'<sup>254</sup> For Athanasius, a pure soul is always concentrating on God and is not disturbed by anything.

In order to avoid disturbances, a solitary life in the desert is the best choice. Because of the same reason, Antony retired into the inner mountain (ἔσω ὄρος).<sup>255</sup> Throughout the hagiography, keeping a pure soul is a dominating theme in the ascetic discipline of Antony. When the monks knew that the time when Antony claimed to have seen the soul of the monk Amun was the same as that when he actually died, they were all amazed at 'the purity of Antony's soul' (τὸ καθαρόν τῆς ψυχῆς Ἀντωνίου).<sup>256</sup> For Athanasius, the stability of character (τῇ τῶν ἡθῶν καταστάσει) and the purity of the soul (τῇ τῆς ψυχῆς καθαρότητι) are the two major factors that made Antony stand out from others.<sup>257</sup> Concerning the human soul, Antony's discourse in *V. Ant.* 20 has a very good illustration. Here, Antony urged the monks not to turn back and think about the worldly things again. Then, he explained that virtue (ἀρετὴ) was not difficult. Since men's soul was created 'good and exceedingly upright' (καλὴ καὶ εὐθὺς λίαν), when its rational part was kept in its natural state, virtue was confirmed. Antony further explained that the

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<sup>251</sup> For example, Athanasius portrayed, 'But in thinking about the Christ (ὁ τὸν Χριστὸν ἐνθυμούμενος) and considering the excellence won through him (δι' αὐτὸν τὴν εὐγένειαν), and keeping in mind the spirituality of the soul (τὸ νοερὸν τῆς ψυχῆς λογιζόμενος), Antony extinguished the fire of his opponent's deception.'  
*V. Ant.* 5 (SC 400, p.144).

<sup>252</sup> The Greek word καθαρός appears 7 times, καθαρίζω 6 times, καθαίρω 1 time, καθαρεύω 1 time, and καθαρότης 1 time. Cf. Bartelink, *Athanase d'Alexandrie: Vie d'Antoine*, p.406.

<sup>253</sup> *V. Ant.* 14 (SC 400, pp.172-174).

<sup>254</sup> *V. Ant.* 34 (SC 400, p.228).

<sup>255</sup> *V. Ant.* 49 (SC 400, pp.266-268).

<sup>256</sup> *V. Ant.* 60 (SC 400, p.298).

<sup>257</sup> *V. Ant.* 67 (SC 400, p.312).

human soul was upright when its rational faculty remained in its natural state, as it was created. However, if it turned aside and deviated from its natural state, the soul was said to be evil (κακός). So, the hermit asked the monks to guard against evil thoughts (λογισμῶν ῥυπαρῶν) and preserve their soul for the Lord.<sup>258</sup> Based on this explanation, J. Quasten concludes, ‘To Antony perfection is acquired by the return to our original state, the state in which we were created.’<sup>259</sup> All a monk needs to do is to keep the rational faculty of the soul against external disturbances and use it solely for contemplation of God. All these teachings are consistent with Athanasius’ theology.

Believing that the body often brought in external earthly desires and prevented the soul from contemplating God, Antony tried every effort to neglect the needs of his body. Such asceticism is not due to the hate of the body. Unlike Origen, the purpose of ascetic disciplines is not to teach or train the soul. While the Origenist soul always struggles internally between the flesh and the spirit, the two opposite forces acting on Antonian soul, as well as Athanasian soul, are external worldly temptation transmitted through the body and heavenly beauty reflected in the soul.<sup>260</sup> What Antony wanted was to eliminate all the external disturbances, such as demonic uproar and earthly attractions, so that the soul might concentrate solely on God. On this account, he often said, ‘we ought to devote all our spare time (τὴν πᾶσαν σχολήν) to the soul instead of the body.’<sup>261</sup> For Antony, the energy of a man is limited. The more he pays attention to the desires of the body, the less to the soul.<sup>262</sup> So, the soul must be the first priority for a monk and the body must be enslaved to it. Concerning this topic, Athanasius writes, ‘He [Antony] urged us to concede a little time to the body, out of necessity, but to be intent, for the most part, on the soul and to seek its benefit (ὠφέλειαν), so that it would not be dragged down by bodily pleasures (ὑπὸ τῶν ἡδονῶν τοῦ σώματος), but rather that the body might be subservient (δουλαγωγῆται) to the soul.’<sup>263</sup> As D. B. Brakke has observed, for Antony, an ideal soul was submitted to God, but in control of the body.<sup>264</sup>

### c) Virtuous Life (καλός βίος)

In the *V. Ant.*, the terms that are usually used for ‘virtue’ are the noun ἀρετή, which emerges twenty-three times, and the adjective καλός, which appears nineteen times in

<sup>258</sup> *V. Ant.* 20 (SC 400, pp.188-192).

<sup>259</sup> Quasten, *Patrology*, vol.3, p.42.

<sup>260</sup> See Chapter One part A.2.b and B.2.b.ii of this thesis.

<sup>261</sup> *V. Ant.* 45 (SC 400, p.256).

<sup>262</sup> Inspired by 2 Cor. 12:10, Antony said, ‘the soul’s intensity is strong (ισχύειν τῆς ψυχῆς τὸν νοῦν) when the pleasures of the body are weakened (αἱ τοῦ σώματος ἀσθενῶσιν ἡδοναί).’ *V. Ant.* 7 (SC 400, p.152).

<sup>263</sup> *V. Ant.* 45 (SC 400, pp.256-258).

<sup>264</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, p.241. As in the theology of Athanasius bodily death is the separation of the soul from the body, Brakke further argues that the ‘daily martyrdom’ of Antony is the daily distancing of the soul from the body’s passions through renunciation.

total.<sup>265</sup> Basically, their meanings are similar. To have ἀρετή, one must imitate what is good (τὰ καλὰ).<sup>266</sup> At the beginning of his discipline, the young Antony searched and visited zealous people everywhere in order to learn from them. From an old man in the neighbouring village, Antony imitated him in goodness (ἐν καλῷ). He tried every effort to see such good men so that he might receive from them certain supplies for his journey in the way of virtue (ἐφόδιον τῆς εἰς ἀρετὴν ὁδοῦ).<sup>267</sup> As quoted before, Antony believes that virtue is not distant from men, but its realisation lies in themselves. All virtue needed was one's own will (θέλειν). When a soul moves towards God as it was created, the man is in virtue. In contrast, it is evil for one to turn away from his natural state.<sup>268</sup> Echoing Athanasius' theology, internal movement of the soul and external virtue are coherent and synchronous. This background concept explains why Antony said that the way of virtue and the separation from the world ought to be measured by desire and purposefulness.<sup>269</sup>

For Antony, virtuous conduct included things like the monks' mutual encouragement in faith,<sup>270</sup> voluntary relinquishment of earthly wealth,<sup>271</sup> the listening to and obedience to the teachings in the Scriptures,<sup>272</sup> and a completely upright life in the whole day.<sup>273</sup> Like the faith in God, such upright life was one of the major weapons against the devil.<sup>274</sup> When talking about the discrimination of the good and the evil visions, Antony taught that the vision of the good ones (ἡ τῶν καλῶν ὀπτασία) always came with gentleness that would bring the human soul a desire for divine and future realities (πόθος τῶν θείων καὶ τῶν μελλόντων).<sup>275</sup> For Antony, the original created human soul was good and the target of asceticism was a return to this natural state. The fact that the names are written in heaven (τὸ ἐν οὐρανῷ γεγράφθαι τὰ ὀνόματα) is a witness to our virtue and manner of life (μαρτύριον τῆς ἡμῶν ἀρετῆς καὶ τοῦ βίου).<sup>276</sup> Actually, under the portraiture of Athanasius, Antony was a perfectly virtuous monk who was to be imitated by others.<sup>277</sup>

<sup>265</sup> Cf. Bartelink, *Athanase d'Alexandrie: Vie d'Antoine*, p.395, 406.

<sup>266</sup> Using this reason, Antony asked two Greek philosophers to imitate him and become Christians. Cf. *V. Ant.* 72 (SC 400, 320). Here, as stated before, good is for Athanasius reality and evil is unreality. This implies that imitation of what is good is primarily equivalent to the imitation of spiritual reality.

<sup>267</sup> *V. Ant.* 3 (SC 400, p.136).

<sup>268</sup> *V. Ant.* 20 (SC 400, pp.188-190).

<sup>269</sup> *V. Ant.* 7 (SC 400, p.154).

<sup>270</sup> *V. Ant.* 16 (SC 400, p.178).

<sup>271</sup> *V. Ant.* 17 (SC 400, p.182).

<sup>272</sup> *V. Ant.* 19, 55 (SC 400, p.186, 282-284).

<sup>273</sup> *V. Ant.* 55 (SC 400, p.282).

<sup>274</sup> *V. Ant.* 30 (SC 400, p.218).

<sup>275</sup> *V. Ant.* 35 (SC 400, pp.230-232).

<sup>276</sup> *V. Ant.* 38 (SC 400, p.238).

<sup>277</sup> When Antony debated with two Greek philosophers, he said, 'If you consider me wise, become as I am, for we must imitate (δεῖ μιμεῖσθαι) what is good (τὰ καλὰ).' *V. Ant.* 72 (SC 400, p.320).



In the whole life of Antony, we can see the realisation of the Athanasian model of virtuous life. On the negative side, Antony cast off all his bodily desires and walked on the way of asceticism. Firstly, he gave up wealth. According to the property Antony had, he was originally a wealthy young man.<sup>278</sup> However, at the very beginning of his ascetic discipline, he donated all his belongings to the needy so that ‘they would not disturb (μηδ’ ὀχλήσωσιν) him or his sister in any way whatever.’<sup>279</sup> When the devil later tried him several times on this aspect,<sup>280</sup> Antony conquered them all with the hope of getting the promises in heaven (ἐν οὐρανοῖς τὰς ἐπαγγελίας).<sup>281</sup> Secondly, he renounced sex. Antony entered the ascetic life when he was still young. He gave up his opportunity of marriage, as well as the possible sexual relationship with the opposite sex. In accordance with the sexual need of adolescence, the devil attacked him three times: one with ‘foul thoughts’ (λογισμοὺς ῥυπαρούς),<sup>282</sup> one with ‘the form of a woman’ (ὡς γυνή σχηματίζεσθαι),<sup>283</sup> and one with ‘a black boy’ (μέλας παῖς) called ‘the spirit of fornication’ (πνεῦματι πορνείας).<sup>284</sup> As a result, with the help of Christ, Antony toppled them one by one.<sup>285</sup> Finally, he relinquished food. In Antony’s ascetic program, fasting (νηστεία) is one the most remarkable disciplines. At a very early stage, Antony has already practised rigorous fasting and simple diet. He ate once a day, or even once over several days. His food was

<sup>278</sup> According to *V. Ant.* 2 (SC 400, p.134), Antony had ‘three hundred fertile and very beautiful *arourae*’ (ἄρουραι τριακόσαι εὐφοροὶ καὶ πάνυ καλαί). According to Bagnall’s information, an *aroura* was 100 Egyptian cubits, which is equal to 2,756 square meters. The property that Antony had was approximately equivalent to 205 acres. Cf. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, p.332. According to the statistics given by Lewis, Antony’s property was worth more than 80,000 drachmas at that time. According to Egyptian standards, Antony was truly a wealthy young man. Cf. N. Lewis, *Life in Egypt under Roman Rule* (Oxford, 1983), pp.208-210.

<sup>279</sup> *V. Ant.* 2 (SC 400, p.134). Based on the social situation in third-century Egypt, Brakke argues that the main disturbance here was the heavy financial duties of the wealthy villagers. Cf. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, pp.233-234.

<sup>280</sup> The devil first tried him with ‘memories of his possessions, the guardianship of his sister, the bonds of kinship, love of money and of glory, the manifold pleasure of food, the relaxations of life, and, finally, the rigor of virtue’ (*V. Ant.* 5: SC 400, p.142). Later, the devil tempted him with ‘a great silver dish’ (*V. Ant.* 11: SC 400, p.164) and ‘actual gold’ (*V. Ant.* 12: SC 400, p.166).

<sup>281</sup> Here, Antony said, ‘we do not receive our inheritance on earth, but we possess the promises in heaven (ἐν οὐρανοῖς ἔχομεν τὰς ἐπαγγελίας). Putting off the body, then, which is corruptible, we receive it back incorruptible.’ *V. Ant.* 16 (SC 400, p.180).

<sup>282</sup> *V. Ant.* 5 (SC 400, p.144).

<sup>283</sup> *V. Ant.* 5 (SC 400, p.144).

<sup>284</sup> *V. Ant.* 6 (SC 400, p.148). Here, the choice of a black boy may draw on the colour prejudices against black and the adult lover of a boy in some circles of ancient Egypt. Cf. P. Mayerson, ‘Anti-Black Sentiment in the *Vitae Patrum*,’ *HThR* 71 (1978):304-311; and K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (London, 1978), pp.49-50, 118.

<sup>285</sup> After Antony’s victory in the first two temptations, Athanasius explained, ‘Working with him [Antony] was the Lord (συνήργει ὁ Κύριος αὐτῷ), who bore flesh for us, and gave to the body the victory over devil, so that each of those who truly struggle can say, “It is not I, but the grace of God which is with me (ἡ χάρις τοῦ Θεοῦ ἡ σὺν ἐμοί).”’ *V. Ant.* 5 (SC 400, pp.144-146). For the last one, what Antony used to expel the black boy was the scriptural word ‘the Lord is my helper (βοηθός), and I shall look upon my enemies.’ *V. Ant.* 6 (SC 400, p.148).

bread (ἄρτος) and salt (ἅλας) and drink included water only (μόνον ὕδωρ).<sup>286</sup> He regarded fasting as a weapon to defeat the demons.<sup>287</sup> Again, the devil has tempted him on this kind of human need, but, of course, failed at the end.<sup>288</sup> Besides the above three, Antony did also refuse to take any action that could make his body more comfortable.<sup>289</sup>

On the positive side, Antony imitated the earlier saints and practised the virtues wherever possible. He mirrored the models of the saints by following the teachings of the Scriptures. From the example of Elijah, he learned that an ascetic must prepare to obey God's will.<sup>290</sup> He echoed the martyrs by seeking martyrdom in the persecution under Maximin.<sup>291</sup> Besides, he was also highly prepared to help others. To the poor, he divided all his money to them.<sup>292</sup> To the demonised, he exorcised the evil spirits with faith.<sup>293</sup> To the sick, he healed all their diseases through prayers.<sup>294</sup> To the wicked, he proclaimed the punishment of God.<sup>295</sup> He taught and guided many people to walk on the way to God. After his long discourse to the monks, they became 'all of one mind toward virtue' (ἐν δὲ τῶν πάντων εἰς ἀρετὴν τὸ φρόνημα).<sup>296</sup> In the epilogue of the whole treatise, Athanasius explained that the two major reasons why those saints like Antony were glorified by God were 'their own virtue' (τὴν αὐτῶν ἀρετὴν) and 'the help they render others' (τὴν τῶν ἄλλων ὠφέλειαν).<sup>297</sup> Under the portraiture of Athanasius, Antony was not just an ideal prototype of virtuous life, but also a helpful guide for those who wanted to walk on the way to God.

## 2. Other Major Spiritual Themes in the *Vita Antonii*

Antony is an ideal 'man of God' (θεοῦ ἄνθρωπος) in Athanasius' theology. The bishop composed the hagiography for the imitation of certain monks. He portrayed the spiritual journey of the hermit with many details so that his ascetic program might be followed. However, while composing the *V. Ant.*, Athanasius found that the virtue and

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<sup>286</sup> *V. Ant.* 7 (SC 400, p.152).

<sup>287</sup> *V. Ant.* 23 (SC 400, p.198).

<sup>288</sup> In *V. Ant.* 5 (SC 400, p.142), the devil reminded Antony of 'the manifold pleasure of food' (τροφῆς τὴν ποικίλην ἡδονήν). When later talking about the works of the devil and his demons, he mentioned an experience of being tempted with 'loaves of bread' (ἄρτων). Cf. *V. Ant.* 40 (SC 400, p.244).

<sup>289</sup> For example, he slept on the ground (*V. Ant.* 4: SC 400, p.140), neither changed his mode of dress nor bathed his feet with water (*V. Ant.* 93: SC 400, p.372).

<sup>290</sup> *V. Ant.* 7 (SC 400, p.154).

<sup>291</sup> *V. Ant.* 46 (SC 400, pp.258-260).

<sup>292</sup> *V. Ant.* 2, 3 (SC 400, pp.132-134).

<sup>293</sup> *V. Ant.* 48, 63-64, 70-71 (SC 400, pp.264-266, 300-304, 318-320).

<sup>294</sup> *V. Ant.* 57-58, 61, 70-71 (SC 400, pp.288-292, 298-300, 318-320). According to *V. Ant.* 84 (SC 400, p.352), Antony healed by praying and by calling on the name of Christ only.

<sup>295</sup> *V. Ant.* 86 (SC 400, pp.356-358).

<sup>296</sup> *V. Ant.* 44 (SC 400, p.254).

<sup>297</sup> *V. Ant.* 94 (SC 400, p.376).

the good ending of Antony might also be profitable to other monks and even to the pagans. So, he asked the recipients to read it to them as well. From this epilogue, we can see that there are three more important spiritual messages concealed in the treatise. Although they are not the original purpose of the authoring of the treatise, these subordinate themes can effectively explain many special features of the hagiography.

### a) The ideal life of a monk

In the beginning of the epilogue, Athanasius writes, 'Therefore, read these things now to the other brothers so that they may learn what the life of the monks ought to be (ἵνα μάθωσιν ὁποῖος ὀφείλει τῶν μοναχῶν ὁ βίος εἶναι).'<sup>298</sup> For Athanasius, Antony was an ideal monk and everything he did was good and imitable. Besides persuading the readers to walk on the way to God by disciplining oneself in asceticism, he also urged others to follow the hermit and practise all the virtues he did. Since the first half of the treatise is mainly concentrated on Antony's pursuance of perfection, the most representative merits of a perfect monk are offered in chapters 56 to 88. In these chapters, a lot of things about the hermit are brought out. Amongst them, four major subjects may be inferred. Firstly, Antony performed miracles with the spiritual powers from Christ. Secondly, although being unlettered, he had an extraordinary wisdom over others. Thirdly, while despising the imperial authorities, he honoured the ecclesiastical clergy very much. Finally, Antony was a great supporter of the orthodox church and was anti-Arian. Since we will touch on the first two subjects in the next two parts, only the last two of them are discussed here.

In *V. Ant.* 67, Athanasius mentions that Antony was 'tolerant in disposition' (τὸ ἡθος ἀνεξίκακος) and 'humble in soul' (τῇ ψυχῇ ταπεινόφρων). He did not only revere the law of the earthly church with extreme care, but also wished every cleric to be shown more honour than himself. He was not ashamed to bow his head to bishops and priests, and willing to assist and respect even a deacon. In contrast with secular practice, Antony did not show any special deference to the imperial authorities. Rather, many important officials of the Roman Empire, such as military officers, judges and counts, extolled the hermit and sought help from him.<sup>299</sup> Sometimes, even when they made several requests,

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<sup>298</sup> *V. Ant.* 94 (SC 400, p.376).

<sup>299</sup> These officials include, for example, a military officer Martinianus (*V. Ant.* 48: SC 400, p.264), a count Archelaus (*V. Ant.* 61: SC 400, p.298), all the judges (*V. Ant.* 84: SC 400, p.352) and an unnamed military commander (*V. Ant.* 85: SC 400, p.354). Concerning the count Archelaus, the London Papyrus 1914 records that an Ἀρχέλαος was arrested for his anti-Melitian activities in the early 330s. Cf. Bell, *Jews and Christians in Egypt*, pp.32-38. Besides, Socrates' and Rufinus' *Historia Ecclesiastica* also report that a count Archelaus aided Athanasius at the Synod of Tyre in 335. Cf. Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.29 (PG 67, col.160); Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.15-16 (PL 21, col.488). For a discussion of this count, see A. H. M. Jones, et al. *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, vol.1 (Cambridge, 1971), p.100.

Antony still turned aside and declined the journey to them.<sup>300</sup> To the duke Balacius who sharply persecuted the Christians of Athanasius' church, the hermit sent a warning letter and proclaimed the judgement of God. Just a few days later, Balacius died in a strange accident.<sup>301</sup> Antony's cool attitude even extended to the emperors. When Constantine and his sons Constantius and Constans learned Antony's fame, the hagiographer narrated that these emperors wrote repeatedly<sup>302</sup> to the hermit as to a father and begged to receive responses from him. However, Antony considered the documents of no great importance and said to the monks that an emperor was just 'a man' (ἄνθρωπος). After being urged by the monks, Antony then wrote to the emperors and asked them to remember the coming judgement, to know that Christ alone is the true eternal emperor, to show concern for justice and to care for the poor. This letter Athanasius told us the emperors were glad to receive.<sup>303</sup>

Such an attitude is markedly different from the mood in Athanasius' earlier treatises like *Apol. Const.*, but is consistent with his later works like *Hist. Ar.*. Based on this, many scholars suggest that this attitude was most probably Athanasian. However, as Meyer has mentioned, the emperors before Constantine had demanded worship for themselves and the refusal of emperor worship had been one of the main issues in the persecutions of the Christians. So, Antony wrote to them only after he knew that the emperors were Christians. And also, he reminded his imperial correspondents that they should not forget the church's uncompromising position that all authority came from God. The true and eternal emperor is Christ. Antony's negative attitude to the emperors is conceivable and should be regarded as Antonian as well.<sup>304</sup> In contrast with ordinary secular values, in the *V. Ant.*, the priority of the ecclesiastical clergy is much higher than the imperial authorities.

Besides such reverse order of priority, another important subject in the *V. Ant.* 56-88 is that Antony was a great supporter of the orthodox church and was anti-Arian. As discussed before, Antony has maintained a good relationship with Athanasius since the bishop was young.<sup>305</sup> At the request of 'the bishops and all the brothers' (τῶν ἐπισκόπων καὶ τῶν ἀδελφῶν πάντων), the hermit came down from the mountain and went into Alexandria to support the Athanasian episcopate.<sup>306</sup> To Serapion of Thmuis, one of the most important orthodox bishops in Egypt, Antony shared his secret vision about the

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<sup>300</sup> *V. Ant.* 84-85 (SC 400, pp.352-354).

<sup>301</sup> *V. Ant.* 86 (SC 400, pp.356-358).

<sup>302</sup> Here, Athanasius used the imperfect ἔγραφον, implying repeated writing. Most translations of the hagiography have not shown this point.

<sup>303</sup> *V. Ant.* 81 (SC 400, pp.342-344).

<sup>304</sup> Meyer, *St. Athanasius: The Life of Saint Antony*, p.133-4 n.273.

<sup>305</sup> See part A.2 of this chapter.

<sup>306</sup> *V. Ant.* 69-71 (SC 400, pp.314-320).



church.<sup>307</sup> It was to these two bishops, Athanasius and Serapion, that Antony handed down his sheepskins, which signified his spiritual authority.<sup>308</sup> Since Antony left no body behind, these two bishops became the only successors of the charismatic hermit. Contrasting with this friendly atmosphere, according to the hagiography, Antony hated the Arians, Melitians and other heretics very much. He never held communion with the Melitian schismatics, and also he charged everyone not to go near the Arians.<sup>309</sup> He described them as the forerunner of Antichrist (πρόδρομον τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου) and their words as worse than the poison of serpents (ῥέων χείρονας).<sup>310</sup> Having heard that he was falsely asserted to be of the same mind as the Arians, he came down and denounced the Arians publicly.<sup>311</sup> In his vision rehearsed to Serapion, Antony delineated the Arians as senseless beasts marring the church.<sup>312</sup> Their teachings he condemned as 'not from the apostles (οὐ τῶν ἀποστόλων), but from the demons (τῶν δαιμόνων), and from their father, the devil (τοῦ διαβόλου).'<sup>313</sup>

Since Antony was regarded as a prototype of an ideal monk, the above two personal attitudes of the hermit eventually transmitted a message that a monk should support the orthodox hierarchy and resist all the anti-Athanasian parties, such as Constantius' regime, the Arians and the Melitians. Because of this, using the Weberian sociological model of the charismatic figure, B. Brennan suggests that such loyalty of the hermit to the Athanasian episcopate could help in the routinisation of the Antonian charismatic domination and thus neutralised the radical anti-organisational tendencies of the eremitical movement.<sup>314</sup> Similarly, D. B. Brakke also argues that the *V. Ant.* could help in achieving political unity within the Egyptian church.<sup>315</sup> It may be admitted that the hagiography most likely has these functions. However, as stated before, they are by-products of the treatise only. Actually, if we compare the *V. Ant.* with the *Vita Pachomii*, a similar picture may be found. As recorded by the anonymous author, when there was need for the Eucharist, Pachomius would invite a priest from the nearest churches to lead the feast.<sup>316</sup> After hearing that the Arians forcefully rebelled against the church, the abbot

<sup>307</sup> *V. Ant.* 82 (SC 400, pp.344-346).

<sup>308</sup> *V. Ant.* 91 (SC 400, p.370).

<sup>309</sup> *V. Ant.* 68 (SC 400, p.314).

<sup>310</sup> In *V. Ant.* 68 (SC 400, p.314), this 'poison of serpents' is associated with the words of a group of people called Ἀπειομαντοί. This title implied the fanaticism with which the heresy spread and maintained itself. Cf. Newman, *Select Treatises of St. Athanasius in Controversy with the Arians*, vol.2, pp.377-379.

<sup>311</sup> *V. Ant.* 69 (SC 400, pp.314-316).

<sup>312</sup> Athanasius records that the vision was actualised two years later. Most probably, it referred to the events in 356, when Athanasius was expelled and his episcopate was delivered to his opponents.

<sup>313</sup> *V. Ant.* 82 (SC 400, p.348).

<sup>314</sup> B. R. Brennan, 'Athanasius' *Vita Antonii*: A Sociological Interpretation,' *VC* 39 (1985):209-227.

<sup>315</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, pp.245-265.

<sup>316</sup> *Vita Pachomii—Graeca* 27 (Athanasakis, p.32).

was greatly pained in his heart.<sup>317</sup> In the Arian controversy, the monks were ordered ‘not to pray together with anyone who shares the heresy of the Arians’ (οὐδενὸς εὐξασθαι συναιρομένου Ἀρειανοῖς).<sup>318</sup> Having heard that Athanasius had sailed up to the Thebaid, Theodore took other monks, overtook the bishop and greeted him.<sup>319</sup> It seems that the anti-Arian attitude in the *V. Ant.* was quite common in some monastic circles at that time. For the recent proposal that this pro-Athanasian theme in the hagiography was purely the bishop’s own artificial addition, I see no reason to agree with it.

## b) The rewards from God

Besides learning the model of an ideal monk, Athanasius has also suggested one more function of the treatise in the epilogue. Here, he asked the recipients to read the hagiography to other brothers ‘so they may believe that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ glorifies those who glorify him (τοὺς δοξάζοντας αὐτὸν δοξάζει), and not only leads those who serve him to the end into the Kingdom of heaven, but even here, though they conceal themselves and seek to retire, he makes them known (φανeroῦς) and celebrated (διαβοήτους) everywhere, both because of their own virtue (τὴν αὐτῶν ἀρετὴν) and because of the help they render others (τὴν τῶν ἄλλων ὠφέλειαν).’<sup>320</sup> This is basically an encouragement to the readers so that they might become more eager to follow the model of Antony. The reward of following the model of the hermit is the glorification of oneself by God both in the heaven and on the earth.

This declaration is essentially deduced from the previous chapter. Here, after concluding the life of Antony with his death, the hagiographer praised his virtue and showed God’s love to him with his extraordinary healthy body. Although he took simple food and clothing and did not bathe his body throughout his life, he remained so healthy that his eyes were undimmed, his teeth had not fallen out, and both his feet and hands remained strong. He even seemed brighter and appeared to have more energetic strength than others. Journeying on the ascending way to God, he foretasted on earth the heavenly immortality. However, since Antony had already died, all the above could not be proved. So, Athanasius turned his argumentation and said, ‘Proof of his virtue and that his soul was loved by God is found in the fact that he is famous everywhere (πανταχοῦ τοῦτον διαβεβοῆσθαι) and is marvelled at by everyone (θαυμάζεσθαι παρὰ πάντων), and is dearly missed by people who never saw him (ποθεῖσθαι παρὰ τῶν μὴ ἑώρακότων αὐτόν).’<sup>321</sup> To prove this, Athanasius pointed out that though concealed and sitting in a mountain,

<sup>317</sup> *Vita Pachomii—Graeca* 113 (Athanasakis, p.156).

<sup>318</sup> *Vita Pachomii—Graeca* 138 (Athanasakis, p.182).

<sup>319</sup> *Vita Pachomii—Graeca* 143-144 (Athanasakis, pp.186-190).

<sup>320</sup> *V. Ant.* 94 (SC 400, p.376).

<sup>321</sup> *V. Ant.* 93 (SC 400, p.374).

Antony was heard of everywhere in Spain, Gaul, Rome and Africa.<sup>322</sup> Since the primary recipients of the hagiography were certain monks abroad, surely, this evidence was more persuasive for them.

Underlying this concept of man's being glorified by God is the immanence of divine power. Long before the Christian era, the ancient Greek philosophers, such as Plato, had already proposed that the world was composed of two levels, that of the visible and that of the invisible. In pagan religions, all things were populated with gods. To Christianity, these gods were replaced by demons, angels and the all-pervading presence of God himself.<sup>323</sup> So, the awareness of the divine and demonic activities was nearly universal in the ancient world, as well as the ancient church. Inescapably, according to *C. Gent.*, such cosmological perception was also adopted by Athanasius.<sup>324</sup> As B. Ramsey observes, in monastic settings, such consciousness of spiritual beings was considerably heightened.<sup>325</sup> Nearly all the ancient biographies of the famous monks, such as the *Vita Pachomii*, are full of miracles. Of course, this phenomenon appears also in the hagiography of Antony. For the hermit, nearly all earthly matters are actually the activities of invisible beings. His foul thoughts were temptations of the devil. His bodily pains were the attacks of the demons. Similarly, his visions were the inspirations of God.

With this worldview as background, Athanasius transmitted a message that God would glorify those who glorified Him. In the *V. Ant.*, nearly all goodness and miraculous acts of the hermit are eventually attributed to God. It was the grace of God that he defeated the devil.<sup>326</sup> It was the power of Christ that he healed diseases and cast out demons.<sup>327</sup> It was the work of God that he had the exceptional wisdom to refute the philosophers.<sup>328</sup> It was also the love of God that he remained healthy until his death.<sup>329</sup> Because of the miracles that God had done through him, the reputation of Antony became so great that a lot of people, including both Christians and pagans, were attracted to seek him.<sup>330</sup> The hagiographer concludes at the end of the treatise that, though the servants of God concealed themselves, God made them known and celebrated them everywhere.

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<sup>322</sup> Concerning how Antony was propagated in the west, different explanations have been proposed. In any case, Athanasius was definitely a key person for the popularity of the hermit. For a discussion of Athanasius' monastic effort, see Chapter Four part B.2 of this thesis.

<sup>323</sup> For fuller discussions of the philosophies and pagan religions in the ancient world, see D. L. Balás, 'Philosophy,' *EEChr* 2:914-918 and E. Ferguson, 'Pagan Religion,' *EEChr* 2:846-848.

<sup>324</sup> For Athanasius, the whole universe is filled with the Word of God. This Word gives life and protection to everything and everywhere. Cf. *C. Gent.* 42 (Thomson, p.114).

<sup>325</sup> Ramsey, *Beginning to Read the Fathers*, pp.159-160.

<sup>326</sup> *V. Ant.* 5-6, 51-53 (SC 400, pp.144-148, 272-278).

<sup>327</sup> *V. Ant.* 57-58, 61-64, 83-84 (SC 400, pp.288-290, 298-302, 350-352).

<sup>328</sup> *V. Ant.* 72-80 (SC 400, pp.320-340).

<sup>329</sup> *V. Ant.* 93 (SC 400, pp.372-374).

<sup>330</sup> *V. Ant.* 48, 61-64, 70-71, 84 (SC 400, p.266, 298-302, 318-320, 352).

Because of this purpose of showing God's glorification of Antony, the hermit appeared to be commended everywhere in the treatise. From this phenomenon, some scholars, such as R. T. Meyer, have falsely categorised the hagiography as an encomium.<sup>331</sup> However, as stated above, the repeated emphases on God's actions on the hermit have shown that what the hagiographer really wanted to stress is God's glorification of His faithful servants. What was admired is not the personal achievements of the hermit, but the masterstrokes that God did through him. Although Antony seemed to be praised in the hagiography, this is not the primary purpose of the composition of the treatise. Actually, even the theme 'Rewards from God' does still need to subordinate itself under the main theme 'Spiritual journey of the man of God.'

### c) The superiority of Christianity

In the epilogue, Athanasius asked the recipients to read the hagiography, not only to the brothers, but to the pagans as well. Here, he writes, 'And if the need arises, read this to the pagans (τοῖς ἐθνικοῖς) as well, so they may understand by this means that our Lord Jesus Christ is God and Son of God—and, additionally, that the Christians who are sincerely devoted to Him and truly believe in Him not only prove that the demons (τοὺς δαίμονας), whom the Greeks consider gods (θεοὺς), are not gods, but also trample and chase them away as deceivers (πλάνους) and corrupters of mankind (φθορέας τῶν ἀνθρώπων), through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom belongs glory forever and ever.'<sup>332</sup> Following his predecessors, Athanasius suggests the devil and his demons are the enemies of good. Envy the human race, they cheat men with their illusions<sup>333</sup> and hide the knowledge of God so that they become ignorant of divine reality.<sup>334</sup> In order that human beings will not turn to battle against them, the demons set men against each other in war.<sup>335</sup> As for the pagan religions, Athanasius regards their gods as demons and says, 'they worshipped idols and offered sacrifices to the demons' (εἰδώλοις ἐλάταρευον καὶ δαίμοσιν ἔσπενδον θυσίας).<sup>336</sup> Concerning the heresies in the church, as other fathers, he claims that they are actually the inventions of the devil.<sup>337</sup>

With this traditional Christian demonology as background, Athanasius tries to demonstrate in the hagiography that Jesus Christ is the true God and the gods in the pagan religion are actually demons who are harmful to human beings. As R. T. Meyer

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<sup>331</sup> See part A.3.a of this chapter.

<sup>332</sup> *V. Ant.* 94 (SC 400, p.376).

<sup>333</sup> *De Incarn.* 47 (Thomson, p.252).

<sup>334</sup> *De Incarn.* 13 (Thomson, p.164).

<sup>335</sup> *De Incarn.* 52 (Thomson, p.264).

<sup>336</sup> *De Incarn.* 51 (Thomson, p.262).

<sup>337</sup> *Ad Aeg. Lib.* 3 (PG 25, col.544).



says, ‘There is a striking popular element in the *Vita*—the accounts of demons.’<sup>338</sup> Demonology is an impressive subject in the hagiography. Throughout the treatise, the struggles with the devil and other miraculous phenomena may be seen everywhere. According to Antony’s discourse to the monks, the demons deceived the Greeks through apparitions and blocked Christians’ way to heaven.<sup>339</sup> However, because of the victory of Christ on the cross, the devil and his demons have become weak and powerless.<sup>340</sup> Every time when the demons wanted to assault Antony, they were subsequently conquered by him through the power of God. Every time when a demonised person was brought before the hermit, the demons were cast out without much resistance. In the *V. Ant.*, a picture of complete victory of Christ over demons, Christianity over paganism, was clearly revealed.

Besides this demonological theme, in the treatise, there is another message that has similar function. That is what B. Ramsey called ‘the higher wisdom of the ascetic.’<sup>341</sup> According to the *V. Ant.*, although the hermit had no schooling, he was taught by God and was excessively wise and intelligent. He could memorise and grasp everything in the Scriptures that was read to him.<sup>342</sup> As we have mentioned, the knowledge one obtains through correct contemplative actions is that of divine reality. It is true and superior. In contrast, since the souls of heathens are impure and easily deceived by the demons, they cannot grasp the truth. The philosophical wisdom one gets through human intelligence is not that of reality. So, it is inaccurate and inferior. In *V. Ant.* 72-80, three encounters of the Greek philosophers with the hermit are recorded. Consistently, each time, the philosophers were worsted. In the first visit, a message that the philosophers should imitate the Christians was transmitted.<sup>343</sup> In the second one, after a series of dialogues, the hermit concluded, ‘Now you see that in the person whose mind is sound there is no need for letters’ (ἘϞ τοίνυν ὁ νοῦς ὑγιαίνει, τοῦτω οὐκ ἀναγκαῖα τὰ γράμματα).<sup>344</sup>

Amongst the three encounters, the third challenge is the most lengthy and most important. Here, the philosophers asked Antony for an explanation of the Christian belief with the intention of scoffing at it. However, the hermit answered them wisely and powerfully. After a long conversation, resonating with the demonological theme, Antony demonstrated the power of the faith in Christ by exorcising some demons. As a result, the philosophers were all persuaded to confess that Christianity was better than Hellenism,

<sup>338</sup> Meyer, *St. Athanasius: The Life of Saint Antony*, p.13.

<sup>339</sup> *V. Ant.* 22 (SC 400, pp.194-196).

<sup>340</sup> *V. Ant.* 41 (SC 400, p.246).

<sup>341</sup> Ramsey, *Beginning to Read the Fathers*, pp.158-159.

<sup>342</sup> *V. Ant.* 3 (SC 400, p.138).

<sup>343</sup> *V. Ant.* 72 (SC 400, pp.320-322).

<sup>344</sup> *V. Ant.* 73 (SC 400, p.322).

and that an active faith was higher than a logical demonstration.<sup>345</sup> At the end of the narrative, Antony asked the philosophers to consider Christianity and said, 'You believe too, then (πιστεύσατε οὖν καὶ ὑμεῖς), and you will see that what we have is not skill with words, but faith that works through love for Christ (πίστις δι' ἀγάπης τῆς εἰς τὸν Χριστὸν ἐνεργουμένη). And if you possess this also you will no longer seek proofs through arguments, but will realise that faith in Christ is sufficient in itself (αὐτάρκη τὴν εἰς τὸν Χριστὸν πίστιν ἡγήσεσθε).'<sup>346</sup> Functionally, this is not just an invitation of Antony to the philosophers, but also that of Athanasius to his pagan readers.

### 3. Messages to its Contemporary Readers

For many modern readers, the severe ascetic life of Antony is preposterous and crazy. However, how did the ancient readers conceive it? Focusing on its function in the fourth-century controversy, many modern scholars argue that its key function is to defeat the Arians or to unite the church. If as we have shown these views are incorrect, what then did Athanasius actually transmit through it? Today, most people are in certain degrees the heirs of the Romantic Movement of northern Europe. When dealing with the religious history of antiquity, they tend to emphasise subjective religious experience. However, as P. Brown points out, the invisible world was for ancient people as real as the visible.<sup>347</sup> To understand their thoughts and responses to the hagiography, we must see things through their worldview, cultural background and personal experience.

#### a) Distinctive Messages in Ancient Background

Although the *V. Ant.* was written on the request of certain foreign monks, according to its epilogue, it was to be read to others, including Christians and pagans. Its potential readers spread over the whole Roman Empire. In area, they consisted of citizens in Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Italy, Gaul, and many other districts. According to race, they included Greeks, Romans, Jews, Arabians, as well as many other types of Asians, Africans and Europeans.<sup>348</sup> Besides, these readers might also come from different religions. While most of them were Christians, others might be the supporters of Judaism, Stoicism, Epicureanism, Neoplatonism, Manichaeism or other traditional Hellenic cults.<sup>349</sup> Because of different cultural backgrounds and personal experiences,

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<sup>345</sup> *V. Ant.* 74-80 (SC 400, pp.324-340).

<sup>346</sup> *V. Ant.* 80 (SC 400, pp.338-340).

<sup>347</sup> Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity*, pp.9-11.

<sup>348</sup> For a discussion of the publication and circulation of early Christian literature, see H. Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven and London, 1995), chap.3.

<sup>349</sup> A lot of evidences have shown that these religions and philosophies were still active after the conversion of the emperor Constantine. For overviews of the religions in the Roman Empire, see C. Bailey, 'Religion and Philosophy,' *The Legacy of Rome*, ed. C. Bailey (Oxford, 1923), pp.237-264. After the death

their responses to the hagiography might be very diverse. However, there is evidence that the *V. Ant.* had already become very popular shortly after its publication.<sup>350</sup> It was widely loved, or even imitated, by many ancient people. Certainly, there should be some elements in the treatise that could induce resonance amongst the multitude at that time and thus made it likeable. These elements include for example their common religious tradition and the fourth-century social environment. By seeing the hagiography through these elements, its distinctive messages to the contemporary readers may be deduced.

#### i) To the Pagans

In the ancient Roman world, two cultural backgrounds are particularly noteworthy for our present study. The first one is the Roman adaptation of oriental religions. According to C. Bailey, the reason of this tendency was not just the characteristic Roman readiness to adopt and adapt, but also the increasing dissatisfaction with the traditional civic cults. Men's minds wanted something more vital and emotional.<sup>351</sup> Early around 204 BC, the first oriental divinity, namely Magna Mater, has already been imported to Rome by a governmental decision. Later, in the wars, the soldiers brought back other religions from different areas. These divinities included Cybele from Cappadocia, Isis from Egypt, Mithra from Persia, Sabazios from Phrygia, Atargatis from Syria, Baal from Palestine and Jupiter from Doliche.<sup>352</sup> All of them were very popular in the empire. By the third century, Mithra even became the soldiers' god above all others. Concerning the influences of these oriental religions, Bailey says, 'There can be no doubt that this influx of Oriental cults was a weakening of Rome's religious consciousness.'<sup>353</sup> At the end of the third century, many Roman citizens have become disloyal to their state-religion and many of them were well prepared to adopt new thoughts.

Another important background is the victory theme in Roman religion. In 1979, while focusing his attention on the literature of the upper class, J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz deduced that the care of the Roman magistrate for the ritual acts was not to obtain blessing, but to gain freedom from the gods, which allowed him to do whatever he wanted. He believes that, rather than safety and advantage for individuals, Roman religion was mainly for the victory of the state in the wars.<sup>354</sup> Following this victory

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of Constantius, the new emperor Julian even attempted to subvert Christianity and ordered his army to sacrifice to the old gods. For Julian's religious policies, see G. W. Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate* (London, 1978), pp.79-93.

<sup>350</sup> Concerning the popularity of the hagiography, see Gregg, *Athanasius: The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, pp.13-17.

<sup>351</sup> Bailey, 'Religion and Philosophy,' p.259.

<sup>352</sup> For a discussion of the features of these oriental religions, see A. Momigliano, *On Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (Middletown, 1987), pp.187-190.

<sup>353</sup> Bailey, 'Religion and Philosophy,' p.260.

<sup>354</sup> J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion*, Oxford, 1979.

theme, A. Wardman argued in 1982 that the basic importance of the Roman imperial cult was to ensure the victory of the empire. Because of this, the political and military defeats in the third century marked a turning point of the Roman paganism. For the same reason, after the victory of Constantine in the battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312, Christian monotheism was quickly accepted as a more powerful means to save the empire.<sup>355</sup> As the Romans were basically 'a nation of battle,' the ability of a religion to bring forth victory was essential for them.

In the *V. Ant.*, a complete victory of Christianity over paganism was pictured. This theme well suited the need and taste of the Romans. In the treatise, the hagiographer persuaded the pagans to convert. Because of the adaptation of oriental religions, they were well prepared to accept new thoughts. To the challenge of the *V. Ant.* to their traditional belief, their attitudes were in general open. In their minds, the ability to bring in victory was the most crucial factor in assessing a religion. As the Christian emperor Constantine had won in the decisive battles against his pagan enemies, the emphasis of the superiority of Christianity over paganism could certainly induce much resonance amongst the readers. Through the power of the Christian God, the pagan demons might be cast out and defeated. Because of the teachings of Jesus Christ and His Scriptures, the Greek philosophers had to learn wisdom from an unlettered hermit. It is hard to say how many pagans were converted by the hagiography. But, surely, its apologetic and evangelical influences existed.

## ii) To the Average Christians

As discussed before, asceticism was at the time of Athanasius a generally accepted pattern of exercises facilitating one's access to the divine. Both the Scriptures and the earlier fathers have ascetic elements in their teachings. Besides the orthodoxy, such thought may also be found amongst the heresies. For Encratites, marriage was nothing else than fornication. Animal food was something to be rejected.<sup>356</sup> For Marcionites, opposition to the evil world created by the demiurge demanded an ascetic posture. So, they abandoned meat and wine, and also restricted sex.<sup>357</sup> According to Gregg and Groh's work, even the Arian soteriology was highly ascetic.<sup>358</sup> It seems that, when the *V. Ant.* was published, asceticism was already deeply rooted in the mind of its contemporary readers. What the hagiography crucially promoted amongst the ancient Christians is not ordinary type of asceticism, but monasticism only.

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<sup>355</sup> A. Wardman, *Religion and Statecraft among the Romans*, London, 1982.

<sup>356</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 1.28.1 (PG 7, col.690-691).

<sup>357</sup> Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem* 1.29 (PL 2, col.280-282).

<sup>358</sup> Gregg and Groh, *Early Arianism: A View of Salvation*, chap.3.



From the historical background of the fourth-century Egyptian Christians, two important factors facilitating the wide spread of monastic movement may be discerned. The first one is the ever-rising cost of living and taxation. Finance had long been a troublesome problem for the Roman Empire. After the granting of Roman citizenship to the Italians, the conquered territory became liable to a direct tax, which was paid by the communities either in kind or in money. Because of the huge expense in the maintenance of the army, the defence of the frontiers and the general administration of the provinces, different types of tax, such as *chrysargyron* for the merchants, *epikephalaion* for the provincials, and land-tax and many surcharges for the villagers, had been levied.<sup>359</sup> Because of numerous factors, the taxes gradually increased and became onerous burdens.<sup>360</sup> This taxation problem was particularly serious in Egypt. Around the early third century, in order to consolidate the towns and villages in Egypt, the emperor Septimius Severus ordered the establishment of the Institution of Municipal Councils in each Egyptian metropolis and assigned the *Decuriones* to organise the collection of taxes.<sup>361</sup> Afterwards, an increasing responsibility to the community was added to the villagers.<sup>362</sup> As a result, in order to avoid the intolerable financial burdens, some villagers escaped into the wilderness.<sup>363</sup>

The second factor is the substitution of martyrdom. Because of their uncompromising posture to imperial cults, Christians were persecuted frequently. Started by Nero and Domitian, oppressions against them were continued by Trajan, Marcus Aurelius, Maximin Thrax, Decius and Diocletian.<sup>364</sup> Because of persecutions, a vast number of Christians fled from the towns and villages to the wilderness. For several

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<sup>359</sup> According to Bagnall's statistics, in the third-century Egypt, the amount of *chrysargyron* per person was about 5 artabas of wheat per year, and that of *epikephalaion* was between 1 to 2 artabas of wheat. The total of the land-tax and the subcharges per aroua of farmland were around 2.1 artabas of the related agricultural products per year. One artaba is about 30 kg, and 1 artaba of wheat is approximately equal to 3,000 talents. Cf. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, pp.153-160. Concerning the burdensome taxes, N. Lewis adds, 'What made the tax burden so oppressive was not only the size of the levies imposed, but also their sheer numbers.' Lewis, *Life in Egypt under Roman Rule*, p.165.

<sup>360</sup> For the administration and taxation in the Roman Empire, see H. S. Jones, 'Administration,' *The Legacy of Rome*, ed. C. Bailey (Oxford, 1923), pp.91-139.

<sup>361</sup> In the Republic, taxes were collected by the *Publicani*, or 'tax-farmers.' However, under the Empire, after the establishment of the Institution of Municipal Councils, the *Decuriones*, who were senators of the councils, took up the duty. Cf. P. Grimal, *The Civilization of Rome* (London, 1963), p.446.

<sup>362</sup> Cf. Lewis, *Life in Egypt under Roman Rule*, pp.177-184; J. Lallemand, *L'Administration civile de l'Égypte de l'avènement de Dioclétien à la création du diocèse (284-382)*, Brussels, 1964; Rousseau, *Pachomius: The Making of a Community in Fourth-Century Egypt*, pp.3-13.

<sup>363</sup> Cf. A. E. R. Boak and H. C. Youtie, 'Flight and Oppression in Fourth-Century Egypt,' *Studi in onore di Aristide Calderini e Roberto Paribeni*, ed. E. Arslan, vol.2 (Milan, 1957), pp.325-337.

<sup>364</sup> For the conflicts of Christianity and the imperial cults, see J. H. Corbett, 'Paganism and Christianity,' *EEChr* 1:848-852.

reasons, the deserts in Egypt were often chosen as their hiding place.<sup>365</sup> At that time, martyrdom was the ultimate expression of Christian commitment. The martyrs chose death rather than conformity to the Roman way of life. In the hagiography, Athanasius also mentioned a story when Antony longed for martyrdom in the persecution of Maximin.<sup>366</sup> After the conversion of Constantine, persecution ceased and Christians began to conform to the ways of the world. Under this new situation, the monastic life developed partly as a substitute for martyrdom and partly as protest against this growing conformity. Following the martyrs, the monks often put themselves under extreme sufferings for Christ. Gradually, they replaced the martyrs as Christian heroes and became a distinct source of divine power.<sup>367</sup> Concerning such substitution in church history, E. E. Malone summarises, 'This concept discussed by Clement, developed and elaborated by Origen, and applied in a practical manner by the monks of the East, soon came to be firmly fixed in thinking of the ancient church.'<sup>368</sup>

To the average Christians, the *V. Ant.* gave a challenge and an encouragement to the monastic life. No matter for religious or economic reasons, at the time when the *V. Ant.* was published, many citizens of the Roman Empire, especially those in the East, had experienced or at least heard about the eremitical life in the wilderness. For them, the Antonian mode of monastic life was not an absolutely impossible choice. Besides, in the hagiography, Antony was described as 'daily being martyred by his conscience' (καθ' ἡμέραν μαρτυρῶν τῇ συνειδήσει).<sup>369</sup> A sense of the monastic substitution of martyrdom was carried. Obviously, for these ordinary Christians, the most important message in the *V. Ant.* was the reward from God. Because of his ascetic disciplines, Antony was finally glorified by God. In addition to an eternal life in the kingdom of heaven, he was also given a great spiritual power, an extraordinary intelligence, a miraculous healthy body and an honourable reputation everywhere. Certainly, these were very attractive to those who sought to live a more religious life. As martyrdom stopped, monastic life like that of Antony became their best alternative choice. Furthermore, the insupportable financial burdens that the state had imposed on the citizen also facilitated the popularity of monasticism. Truly, it is unlikely that people would practise the Antonian mode of life

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<sup>365</sup> Concerning Christians' favour of Egypt, Anson has given three reasons: 1) the climate was warm and almost rainless; 2) the deserts were not too far removed from the narrow stretch of cultivable land beside the Nile; 3) the mountains were riddled with caves for shelter. Cf. Anson, *The Call of the Desert*, p.9.

<sup>366</sup> *V. Ant.* 46 (SC 400, pp.258-260).

<sup>367</sup> Cf. Goehring, 'Monasticism,' 2:769-775.

<sup>368</sup> E. E. Malone, 'The Monk and the Martyr,' *AME*, p.227. However, one should note that asceticism was not considered to be equivalent to martyrdom until the 350's at the earliest. Neither Clement nor Origen nor the *V. Ant.* regarded it the same as martyrdom. Cf. A. E. D. van Loveren, 'Once Again: "The Monk and the Martyr"—Saint Anthony and Saint Macrina,' *StP* 17 (1982):528-538.

<sup>369</sup> *V. Ant.* 47 (SC 400, p.262).

solely for economic reasons. However, the probability that these financial burdens were an auxiliary motive is high.

### iii) To the Ascetic Monks

Basically, the hagiography had two major functions for the ascetic monks. Firstly, it was a guide to the ascetic life. In short, it gave the answer of the question, 'How to become a perfect monk?' By detailed narration of the spiritual journey of Antony, Athanasius told the readers the procedures needed to walk on the way to God and the secret of a successful monastic life. Following the spiritual journey of Antony, the monks should contemplate God through studying the Scriptures, practising its spiritual teachings with faith and praying in heart unceasingly. They should keep their souls pure by avoiding all external disturbances, which required them to live solitarily in the deserts and cast off all bodily desires. Besides, they should also live a virtuous life negatively by renouncing all earthly things, such as wealth, sex and food, and positively by practising virtues, such as constant prayer and helping others, wherever possible.

Secondly, the *V. Ant.* also gave the ascetic monks a model of an ideal monastic life. In short, it answered the question, 'What is a perfect monk like?' In the hagiography, Antony was portrayed as a perfect monk and everything he did was imitable. He defeated the demons with the power from Christ and refuted the Greek philosophers with the wisdom from God. He healed the sick and exorcised the demonised. While keeping a healthy distance from the imperial authorities, he revered the ecclesiastical representatives to an extraordinary degree. Whilst rejecting the heretical teachings of the Arians and the Melitians, he greatly supported the orthodox allies. According to the perfect image of Antony in the hagiography, all these things were to be imitated and followed by the readers.

From our extant ancient sources, we know that Antony had already been very famous in the monastic circles before he died.<sup>370</sup> Wishing to learn from him, the ascetic readers would surely consider the spiritual messages of the hagiography very seriously. We cannot tell exactly how many monks would follow its teachings. However, from the wide dispersion and the rapid translation of the *V. Ant.* into different languages, the popularity and the acceptability of the treatise are certain. Although not measurable, the great influential power of the hagiography amongst the monks is imaginable.

The exemplar of Antony was suitably supported by the religious tradition and the social environment of the Roman Empire. As P. Anson says, 'Everything helped to create

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<sup>370</sup> Cf. *Vita Pachomii—Graeca* 136 (Athanasakis, pp.178-180). Here, Theodore recalled a statement from Pachomius, which regarded Athanasius, Antony and his coenobitic community as three leading authorities (τρία κεφάλαια) raised by God in Egypt. See also *Vita Pachomii—Graeca* 22, 99, 120 (Athanasakis, p.28, 140, 162-164).

a sort of eremitical mentality, a natural as well as a supernatural urge to be hidden and unknown.<sup>371</sup> For its contemporary readers, the *V. Ant.* was not promoting a new manner of life, but enriching the meaning of an existing lifestyle. What the hagiography did was not to transmit some revolutionary new message, but to consolidate an existing one. It embodied widespread abstract ideas in a concrete monastic figure and made them imitable. It showed to the readers how traditional spiritual teachings such as divine contemplation and self-denial might be practised successfully in real life situation. It also told the readers how prevalent religious trends and social factors might be integrated together. It energised current ascetic thought and catalysed the monastic movement. Using an analogy, what the *V. Ant.* achieved was not sowing a new plant on the soil of the Roman Empire, but making the existing naive tree of monasticism mature.

## **b) Transformation of Spirituality**

As an outstanding spiritual classic, in addition to promoting monasticism, the *V. Ant.* also has many other achievements. For example, quite as the *Martyrium Polycarpi* had set the style for the story of martyrdom, the life of Antony quickly became the paradigm for the genre of Christian hagiography. Besides, this treatise also functioned as a link between Eastern and Western Church. On this point, E. Lanne says, 'For both Western and Eastern Christianity this book is the most precious legacy of Antony. It has produced saints of the quality of St. Augustine and so many others known or unknown in Eastern and Western Christianity during the centuries, and it remains for everyone a powerful stimulant to strive after a life according to the Gospel.'<sup>372</sup> Amongst others, two transformations of ancient spirituality are particularly significant for our present study.

### **i) From Paganism to Christianity**

In his *The Making of Late Antiquity*, P. Brown tried to explain the changes in social patterns and religious thoughts in the Christianisation of the Roman Empire. Instead of introducing a totally alien idea from foreign lands, he argues that these changes were indeed a development of the traditions and ideas deeply imbedded in the Greco-Roman culture. The Christian emphasis of one's relationship with God was not a negation of rational mind, but was an advancement of the individual. With the commission of God, certain individuals might manipulate their supernatural power to influence the whole society. Such individuals included, of course, the emperor Constantine and the monks Pachomius and Antony. After a careful examination of the development of these themes in different centuries, Brown justified at the end his original hypothesis which stated, 'In

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<sup>371</sup> Anson, *The Call of the Desert*, p.10.

<sup>372</sup> E. Lanne, 'The Life of St. Antony by St. Athanasius the Great: A Link between Eastern and Western Christianity,' *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 42 (1992):259.



the period between 200 and 400, Mediterranean men came to accept, in increasing numbers and with increasing enthusiasm, the idea that this “divine power” did not only manifest itself directly to the average individual or through perennially established institutions: rather “divine power” was represented on earth by a limited number of exceptional human agents, who had been empowered to bring it to bear among their fellows by reason of a relationship with the supernatural that was personal to them, stable and clearly perceptible to fellow believers.<sup>373</sup>

From Brown’s work, we may immediately see that the spiritual power of Antony was not a unique case in his time. Rather, the idea that human beings may become agents of divine power was a commonly and increasingly accepted concept. Actually, as J. A. Francis has shown, ‘*The Life of Antony* performed the same *function* for the society of the Church as the *Life of Apollonius* did for the society and culture of the empire.’<sup>374</sup> More than a century earlier, the revolutionary image of Antony was already preceded in the Roman biographical literature by Apollonius. The Antonian mode of human agent was a prevalent model of the manifestation of divine power.

What the *V. Ant.* achieved is transforming existing pagan idea of human agent to Christian version, and converting secular biography to ecclesiastical hagiography. Here, all pagan religious elements were replaced by Christian thoughts. Instead of pagan gods, Antony was taught and empowered by the Triune God. He cast out demons with the power of Christ and defeated the philosophers with the wisdom from Him. Rather than human intelligence, he acquired knowledge from the Scriptures. Unlike Apollonius who geographically visited distant lands, Antony travelled foreign lands intellectually with his soul.<sup>375</sup> Following the conversion of the emperor and the establishment of Christianity as state religion, the *V. Ant.* replaced in the new religious situation the Roman biographies of the heroes, and filled the spiritual and psychological gap previously occupied by them.

## ii) From Origen to Athanasius

The general picture of Antony in the *V. Ant.* was not strange for the contemporary readers. In the Origenist teachings, an idea of spiritual journey very close to that of Antony had already existed long ago. In his extensive scriptural works, Origen frequently presented Christian life as a spiritual journey towards the Promised Land of God. As analysed before, in his twenty-seventh homily on Numbers, the biblical story of the Israelite exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land was treated as an allegory of the

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<sup>373</sup> Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity*, p.12.

<sup>374</sup> J. A. Francis, *Subversive Virtue: Asceticism and Authority in the Second-Century Pagan World* (University Park, 1995), p.188.

<sup>375</sup> For a comparison of the *V. Ant.* with the Roman biographies, see also Meredith, ‘Asceticism—Christian and Greek,’ pp.314-323.

pilgrimages of the souls (*peregrinationes animae*) towards perfection. Here, they escaped from the slavery of the flesh, walked through different stages of trial, won in the battles with the evil power, formed gradually their spiritual life, and finally united with God.<sup>376</sup> All these are comparable with the ascetic journey of Antony. Besides, as M. J. Marx observes, there are also many other similarities between the Origenist and Antonian spiritual journey. For example, they both emphasise progressive advancement and cite similar biblical verses for reference.<sup>377</sup> They both see spiritual life as a constant struggle with the demons, where temptations are proportioned to the spiritual condition of the individual. Concerning the weapons against demonic attacks, both of them lay stress on the use of constant prayer, virtuous life, the communion with Christ and the contemplation of the Scriptures. Besides, they also relate asceticism with martyrdom simultaneously. Of course, Antony could meet almost all the requirements of Origen's perfect Christian.<sup>378</sup> Because of these, Marx concludes, 'There can be little doubt that Athanasius drew inspiration from his great predecessor, especially as regards the ascetic principle so powerfully stimulated by Origen.'<sup>379</sup>

What then are the special features of the *V. Ant.* that are distinctive when compared with the Origenist writings, particularly his homily on Numbers? In addition to difference in method of presentation and literary genre, there are also some variances. For example, as we have mentioned, the Origenist spiritual journey has clear stages, whereas the Antonian one is primarily continuous. Also, asceticism is for Origen to train and to teach the soul so as to gain divine knowledge. Nevertheless, in the hagiography, it is a virtue that facilitates men to receive immortality in heaven. Again, such deviations may be explained by the theological and cosmological context. For Origen, spiritual reality is hierarchical. It consists of spiritual beings with different levels of merits and qualities. It is very natural for spiritual advancement, which aims at ascending to higher levels, to have stages. In contrast, Athanasius has made a clear demarcation between the Creator and creatures, and there is no intermediate being. Instead of contemplating God directly, Athanasian men can only contemplate divine reality indirectly through the 'mirror' in their soul. On the spiritual journey, only human will can ascend gradually to heaven. Human nature will be transformed by God only after death. On this account, the hagiographer does not emphasise the presence of stages. Similarly, as explained before, the Origenist soul is pre-existent and the Athanasian one is created out of nothing. It is very reasonable for their destiny and aim of effort to be adjusted accordingly.

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<sup>376</sup> Origen, *Homiliae in Numeros* 27 (PG 12, col.780-801).

<sup>377</sup> E.g. Phil. 3:13, Lk. 9:62 and 17:32. Cf. *V. Ant.* 7, 20 (SC 400, p.154, 186-188).

<sup>378</sup> Marx, 'Incessant Prayer in the *Vita Antonii*,' pp.123-131.

<sup>379</sup> *Ibid.*, p.133.

Here, it is worth noting that the spirituality of the hagiography is fully consistent with that of Athanasius' other writings. They both conceive Christian life as a journey to God, in which constantly spiritual advancement is needed. They both treat intellectual and moral progress as one single journey, and see asceticism and virtue as two synonyms. They both emphasise the hindering effort of the demons and the victory of Christ. Also, they both suggest the formula *contemplate God with a pure soul through virtuous life*. Everything is so coherent that one cannot see any difference between them. How much the hagiography represents the spirituality of true historical Antony is not known, but certainly it is very Athanasian. One of the most important achievements of the hagiography is to transform the prevalent Origenist spirituality to Athanasian one and make it popular. Since the 'practical' applications of the spirituality of these two fathers are very similar as stated before, what the hagiographer mainly achieved is converting the traditional Alexandrian theological and cosmological context to a new one fitting the orthodox Nicene faith. Again, the full divinity of Christ is the ultimate concern.

### C. Short Conclusion

As his most important and most influential spiritual writing, the *V. Ant.* contains messages totally consistent with the theology and other ascetic teachings of Athanasius. Through the model of Antony, the readers were persuaded to walk on the way to God that was made accessible by Jesus Christ. Pagans Athanasius invited to turn to the way. Average Christians he asked to walk on the way. Ascetic monks he taught how to complete the way to heaven. Although the treatise contains many other details and messages, the main theme is still focused on the spiritual journey and the virtues of Antony. As with other spiritual writings of Athanasius, the teachings of the *V. Ant.* were not created from nothing. While portraying the life of his reverend abba from historical sources, Athanasius maintained his reliance on authority and the tradition. Nearly every major theme of the treatise had its support either from the Scriptures or from the earlier fathers, especially Origen. For the case of the *V. Ant.*, the supports even extended to the religious tradition and the social environment of the Roman Empire. What Athanasius actually achieved was the transformation and the consolidation of existing widely accepted ideas into his own format.

Coming to this point, we have examined the spirituality of Athanasius in his theology, ascetic teachings and the *Vita Antonii*. As we can see, they are conformable with each other. Based on his soteriology, Athanasius believes that Christians should walk on the way to God by *contemplating God with a pure soul through virtuous life*. This theme was expanded in his ascetic teachings. For the bishop, asceticism is the best means for obtaining Christian's spiritual advancement. In the hagiography, this conception is concretised in the life of Antony. With the emphases of the glorious

rewards from God and the superiority of Christianity, the readers, no matter Christians or pagans, were persuaded to accept this spirituality and follow these ascetic teachings of Athanasius. Using analogical terms, the spirituality of Athanasius was rooted in his theology, grew through his ascetic teachings and flowered in his *Vita Antonii*.

So far, we have studied step by step the spirituality of the writings of Athanasius inductively. Basically, they were largely inherited from the Christian tradition and were not so revolutionary as many people suggested. However, as the whole episcopal life of Athanasius was mixed with the Arian controversy, the actual influence of his spirituality and spiritual teachings can only be defined after applying them into their real contexts. In the next chapter, we will put all our findings back onto the fourth-century social and ecclesiastical environment, and try to deduce their functions in the life of Athanasius and the contemporary doctrinal debate.



## IV. SPIRITUALITY AND THE LIFE OF ATHANASIUS

Therefore, when he was brought before him, the proconsul asked if he were Polycarp. And when he confessed that he was, the proconsul tried to persuade him to recant, saying, 'Have respect for your age,' and other such things as they are accustomed to say, 'Swear (ὁμοσον) by the Genius of Caesar, repent, and say, "Away with the atheists (αἶρε τοὺς ἀθέους)!"' So Polycarp solemnly looked at the whole crowd of lawless heathen who were in the stadium, motioned toward them with his hand, and then, groaning as he looked up to heaven, said, 'Away with the atheists!' But when the magistrate persisted and said, 'Swear the oath (ὁμοσον), and I will release you; revile Christ (λοιδορήσον τὸν Χριστόν),' Polycarp replied, 'For eighty-six years I have been his servant, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me (πῶς δύναμαι βλασφημῆσαι τὸν βασιλέα μου τὸν σώσαντά με)?'<sup>1</sup>

This brave confession of Polycarp constituted the prologue of his martyrdom. Behind this confession is a deep belief that woe (*vae*) is to those through whom the name of the Lord is blasphemed, and that a place amongst the saints in heaven is to be given to those who have faith and patient endurance.<sup>2</sup> Polycarp's belief represents a common conviction in the early Christian church. Because of this conviction, many believers bore witness and chose to be martyred for Christ.<sup>3</sup> Because of similar religious convictions, a great number of people took up ascetic practices and became monks or virgins after the persecutions. While urging others to suffer for faith, many fathers such as Origen lived a devout lifestyle according to what they taught.<sup>4</sup> In the ancient world, religious belief was one of the most important motives for personal behaviour, some of which may seem to be irrational, or even unbelievable, for modern researchers.

Devoted commitment to one's own belief was not something limited to Christianity, but existed in almost every antique cultural group. For the Jews, holiness was achieved by keeping the divine commandments as written in the Torah.<sup>5</sup> For the Greeks, Socrates' faithfulness to his philosophy and the subsequent willingness to die by drinking hemlock was a great virtue.<sup>6</sup> Although modern scholars frequently consider the old religious narrations as myths, they were for most ancients undeniable historical facts. Behind their devotion was a worldview totally different from modern 'scientific spirit,'

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<sup>1</sup> *Martyrium Polycarpi* 9.2-3 (Lightfoot & Harmer, pp.232-234).

<sup>2</sup> *Polycarpi Epistula ad Philippenses* 10.3, 12.2 (Lightfoot & Harmer, p.216, 218).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. E. Ferguson, 'Martyr, Martyrdom,' *EEChr* 2:724-728.

<sup>4</sup> While regarding lifelong exercise of asceticism as necessary for acquiring spiritual enlightenment, Origen disciplined himself severely. For the ascetic lifestyle of Origen, see Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.3 (PG 20, col.529).

<sup>5</sup> This requirement was later divided into the 613 commandments set out in the sixteenth-century *Sculchan Aruch* of Joseph Caro. Cf. L. Blue, 'Jewish Spirituality, Judaism,' *DCS*, p.226.

<sup>6</sup> Both Plato and Xenophon portrayed Socrates as virtuous. For a brief discussion of the life of Socrates, see I. G. Kidd, 'Socrates,' *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol.7 (New York and London, 1967), pp.480-486.

which allows no room for divine intervention.<sup>7</sup> Based on the information from the second-century Alexandrian astronomer Claudius Ptolemy, J. F. Kelly observes that the ancient universe was geocentric with the earth (ἡ γαῖα) occupying the centre, while around the earth the planets moved in concentric circles. Beyond the spheres of the planets were the fixed stars for believers of God, and beyond the fixed stars lived God in heaven.<sup>8</sup> For most antique people, the spiritual world was as real as the visible one.<sup>9</sup> God was actively involved in the created cosmos. Living piously according to one's own belief was not something just psychologically or morally important, but was vital for their personal destiny. To understand their religious behaviours one must first comprehend their inner conviction and avoid prejudging them with a modern critical standard. Similarly to understand Athanasius, we must as D. W.-H. Arnold says allow him to speak from his own age and situation, and avoid placing our own presuppositions upon him.<sup>10</sup>

In the previous three chapters, we have examined the spirituality of Athanasius. We found that there is an excellent consistency and coherence between his background and his writings, and also between his theology and his spiritual teachings. Based on the ideology of fourth-century Egypt, the religious tradition of the church and his personal experience, he constructed his theological system, from which he formed his concept of the ideal Christian. All his spiritual teachings including the ascetic model in the *Vita Antonii* had their roots from the earlier fathers and were not uncommon in his time. From these facts, we have definite reasons to believe that Athanasius' theology is a faithful outward expression of his inner spirituality, and that his spiritual teachings are concepts that are matters of intense personal conviction. The problem here is how this conviction affected him if religious belief was, as we say above, one of the most important motives for personal behaviour of the ancients. In this chapter, we will try to review the life of Athanasius and the Arian controversy based on our understanding of his spirituality. However as the entire personal history of the bishop is now still under serious scholarly debate, we will briefly discuss this issue first in the following section.

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<sup>7</sup> Such 'scientific' worldview is now being seriously challenged by postmodernism. Actually, devotional religious activities exist unceasingly throughout human history. Unfortunately, many scholars only regarded them as behaviours of some 'non-scientific' minorities, and neglected them.

<sup>8</sup> J. F. Kelly, *The World of the Early Christians* (Collegeville, 1997), p.48. Although it is not a view universally accepted by all people living in antiquity, it provides a good example on how the ancients saw the world.

<sup>9</sup> For the conception of spiritual world in late antiquity, see also R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, London, 1986.

<sup>10</sup> Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, p.10.

## A. Modern Discussion of the Character of Athanasius

Being discussed variously amongst scholars, Athanasius is nowadays one of the most controversial figures in church history. As illustrated in the introduction of this thesis, there are at present two completely opposite views about the personality of Athanasius. While some scholars praise him as an orthodox saint with great character, some see him as a power-hungry politician, a deceitful propagandist, or even a violent gangster.<sup>11</sup> Both parties claim to have strong evidence supporting their views. Since the dispute is extremely complex, it is impossible to discuss every related aspect in detail here. In this section, we will focus only on the most fundamental and crucial issues.

### 1. Modern Re-evaluation of Athanasius

Traditionally, Athanasius was regarded as a pious saint who defended the Nicene faith against Arianism steadfastly. The majority of our extant ancient sources are pro-Athanasian. These sources not only include those transmitted from the bishop himself, but also comprise pastoral writings from other church fathers such as Gregory of Nazianzus<sup>12</sup> and narratives from early historians such as Sozomen.<sup>13</sup> Because of this large amount of positive literary evidence, the Greek Church called him later the Father of Orthodoxy, whereas the Roman Church counts him amongst the four great Fathers of the East.<sup>14</sup> His noble personality was widely assumed without much challenge throughout the one and a half millennia after his death in AD 373.

Modern re-evaluation of the personality of Athanasius may be divided into two stages, firstly critical reassessment of orthodox evidence and secondly re-examination of anti-Athanasian documents. About the first stage, O. Seeck may be said to be a pioneer. In 1896, he first charged Athanasius with having provided forgeries in his apologetic treatises.<sup>15</sup> This charge of forgery was immediately rejected by scholars like S. Rogala, N. H. Baynes and R. Seiler.<sup>16</sup> Underlying Seeck's accusation is, as D. W.-H. Arnold says, his

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<sup>11</sup> For a survey of modern study about Athanasius, see part A of the Introduction of this thesis.

<sup>12</sup> Gregory called him 'the pillar of the Church' (ὁ στύλος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας). Cf. Gregory, *Oratio* 21.26 (SC 270, p.164). Other early fathers having written for Athanasius also include Basil the Great, Epiphanius of Salamis, Jerome, and many others.

<sup>13</sup> Sozomen described him as 'eloquent and intelligent' (λέγειν τε, καὶ νοεῖν ἱκανὸν), and as 'the sort of man the times had the greatest need of' (οἷου μάλιστα ὁ κατ' αὐτὸν ἐδέϊτο καιρός). Cf. Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.17 (PG 67, col.977). Other ancient historical narratives having a positive attitude towards Athanasius include *Historia Acephala*, *Vita Pachomii*, Socrates' *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Theodoret's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and many others.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Quasten, *Patrology*, vol.3, p.20.

<sup>15</sup> Seeck, 'Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Nicänischen Konzils,' pp.1-71, 319-362.

<sup>16</sup> S. Rogala, *Die Anfänge des arianischen Streits*, Forschungen zur christlichen Literatur und Dogmengeschichte, vol.7 (Paderborn, 1907), p.1; N. H. Baynes, 'Athanasiana,' *JEA* 2 (1925):61-65; and R. Seiler, 'Athanasius' *Apologia contra Arianos*: Ihre Entstehung und Datierung,' Ph.D. diss. (University of Tübingen, 1932), pp.39-40.

own antagonistic attitude toward what he perceived as the political expediency of the church. Seeck's arguments are now generally recognised as unconvincing and invalid.<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, his negative perspective toward Athanasius was afterwards taken up by other scholars, among whom E. Schwartz was dominant. In his studies 'Zur Geschichte des Athanasius,' Schwartz portrayed Athanasius as a power-hungry politician whose apologetic and historical writings were mere propaganda.<sup>18</sup> On these works of Schwartz, T. D. Barnes commented, 'Schwartz pronounced rather than argued: his verdicts are too often both peremptory and arbitrary, and his scholarship is not always impeccable. Schwartz made no real effort to understand Athanasius either as a man or as a writer.'<sup>19</sup> In spite of this, they had succeeded in drawing the attention of people to the potential biases of the traditional picture. Their task was followed by a number of scholars, and their assumptions about Athanasius' ruthlessness in character and disposition to distort truth continue to have a great influence on Athanasian studies today.<sup>20</sup>

Following Schwartz's observations, in order to reconstruct a real historical picture, a series of works has been done by modern scholars. They approach the ancient sources relating to Athanasius with new critical historiographical methods. Here, three tendencies of treating materials may be discerned. Firstly, as Athanasius is now judged as a liar, his apologetic treatises, which were traditionally believed to be trustworthy, should be used with extra care. Secondly, since most later church historians including Socrates, Sozomen, Theodoret and Rufinus seem to have drawn largely from Athanasius himself, their records must be used critically. Thirdly, orthodox works that valued the bishop highly are possibly biased. They should be put under modern re-evaluation. A typical example of such historical reconstruction is the work composed by W. G. Rusch. Based on the above assumptions, he reinterpreted Gregory's *Oratio* 21, an oration originally written for praising Athanasius, as an intentional defence against the popular criticisms about the deeds and character of the bishop, from which he tried to reconstruct the criticisms and then the genuine history.<sup>21</sup>

Accompanying the reassessment of orthodox evidence is the second stage of the re-evaluation of the bishop, namely the re-examination of anti-Athanasian documents. In contrast with the extensiveness of orthodox evidence, there are at present only two ancient documents that accusations against Athanasius mainly rely on. The first one is

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<sup>17</sup> Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, p.11.

<sup>18</sup> Schwartz, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol.3, p.188.

<sup>19</sup> Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, p.3.

<sup>20</sup> See part A of the Introduction for a survey of the critical views against Athanasius after Seeck and Schwartz.

<sup>21</sup> Rusch, 'A la recherche de l'Athanasie historique,' p.176. See also Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, p.67.



Philostorgius' *Historia Ecclesiastica* composed in the fifth century. The original text has perished, and only fragmentary excerpts are preserved. Amongst different sources, the most important one is the ninth-century *Epitome* of Photius, the patriarch of Constantinople between 858 and 892. On this treatise, Photius himself commented, 'He extols all Arians, but abuses and insults all the orthodox, so that this work is not so much a history (ἱστορίαν) as a panegyric (ἐγκώμιον) of the heretics, and nothing but a barefaced reproach and attack upon the orthodox.'<sup>22</sup> Philostorgius' work has long been recognised as a late apology for the Arianism of Eunomius of Cyzicus, and was commonly judged as having 'bias and inaccuracy.'<sup>23</sup> However under the influence of Seeck and Schwartz, new credence was given to this treatise. W. G. Rusch even explicitly commended it as a genuine historical record about the bishop.<sup>24</sup>

Amongst the excerpts of Philostorgius' *Historia Ecclesiastica* preserved in Photius' *Epitome*, two passages have direct reference to Athanasius, one about his consecration to the throne of Saint Mark after the death of Alexander and the other about his return to Alexandria after the first exile. In the study of the Arian controversy, the first passage is especially important as it calls into question the validity of Athanasius' episcopal authority and is considered by many modern scholars as the key issue initiating the series of conflicts between the two parties. According to the summary of Photius, Philostorgius asserted that when the assembled prelates were taking a long time to argue about the successor of Alexander, Athanasius secretly brought two bishops to the Church of Dionysius (Διονυσίου) one evening and forced them to ordain him as bishop. Disregarding the protest of other bishops, he used questionable documents to mislead the emperor in order to obtain imperial approval of his election.<sup>25</sup>

The second, and yet more important, ancient source that modern accusations against Athanasius largely rely on is the London papyrus 1914, which H. I. Bell published in 1924. Concerning this papyrus, Bell commented that it might well claim to rank among the primary authorities for the ecclesiastical history of Egypt in the fourth century.<sup>26</sup> By using a method of elimination, he dated the document as written somewhere in May-June of AD 335, a date just before the Council of Tyre.<sup>27</sup> From the opening and closing of the letter, we know that it was addressed to two priests named Paiêou (Παιηοῦ)

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<sup>22</sup> After examining the style and language used in the treatise, Photius further judged that 'the author is a liar (ὁ ἀνὴρ ψευδολόγος) and the narrative often fictitious.' Photius, *Bibliotheca* 40 (Henry, pp.23-25). In addition to Athanasius, Philostorgius also attacked other orthodox fathers such as Basil the Great.

<sup>23</sup> Quasten, *Patrology*, vol.3, p.532.

<sup>24</sup> Rusch, 'A la recherche de l'Athanase historique,' pp.161-162.

<sup>25</sup> Philostorgius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.11 (GCS 21, pp.22-23).

<sup>26</sup> Bell, *Jews and Christians in Egypt*, p.53. Similar commendation appears also in H. I. Bell, 'New Lights on Saint Athanasius,' *Adelphi* 1 (1923):1009.

<sup>27</sup> Bell, *Jews and Christians in Egypt*, p.57.



and Patabeit (Παταβείτ). Its writer is a person called Callistus (Κάλλιστος). According to Bell's interpretation, he was a Melitian monk or cleric, and was a Copt not wholly at home in Greek. He wrote this letter in order to give 'a circumstantial account of the sufferings of his fellow Meletians at the hands of Athanasius's adherents and of Athanasius himself.'<sup>28</sup>

Basing their understanding on Bell's translation and annotation, many modern scholars recognise the London papyrus 1914 as a powerful proof of the misconduct of Athanasius. Concerning its meaning, the interpretation of R. P. C. Hanson is nearly standard. For him, the papyrus is a factual account written for people under persecution. It describes Athanasius' state of mind just before embarking in order to attend the Council of Tyre, and the barbarous treatment that he is meanwhile dealing out to those Melitians who have opposed him. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of Pachon, Isaac bishop of Leto came to Heraiscus in Alexandria,<sup>29</sup> wanting to have supper with the bishop in the camp called Nicopolis. Some drunken adherents of Athanasius arrived at 3 p.m., with soldiers. They shut the gates of the camp and began searching for Isaac and Heraiscus. Some soldiers in the camp had hidden them and when the Athanasian party could not find them, they attacked some Melitians whom they met coming into the camp and maltreated them and threw them out of Nicopolis. They then arrested five Melitians who were in a hostel, imprisoned them for a time and then threw them too out of Nicopolis, and beat the keeper of the hostel for putting up Melitian monks. And they shut up somebody called Ammon in the camp because he welcomed Melitians into his house. So Callistus and his friends are afraid to visit Heraiscus in the camp. Athanasius was depressed and anxious because the Emperor has arrested and imprisoned Macarius and Archelaus; Athanasius son of Capito went off to kidnap Macarius, but John Arcaph in Antioch heard of it and had them arrested on the charge of slandering Heraiscus.<sup>30</sup> During this period, Athanasius shut up a bishop of the lower country in the meat market, a presbyter in the lockup and a deacon in the great prison, and imprisoned Herascius in the camp. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of Pachon, Athanasius forced seven bishops to leave the area and hence all attacks from him ceased.<sup>31</sup>

Although Seeck's and Schwartz's charges against Athanasius were made about a century ago, they were generally regarded as neglectable opinions held by an extreme minority. One year after his publication of the London papyri, H. I. Bell wrote in an

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p.53. For easy reference, Bell's translation is reproduced in Appendix D.1 of this thesis.

<sup>29</sup> Hanson added here that Heraiscus was 'evidently an eminent Melitian bishop.' He was 'perhaps the Melitian archbishop of Alexandria.' Cf. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p.253.

<sup>30</sup> Hanson here suggested that Archelaus was sent with this other Athanasius to remove Macarius from detention in Tyre by hook or by crook. Cf. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p.253 fn.67.

<sup>31</sup> Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, pp.252-253.

article that Athanasius at the period just after his succession as the Alexandrian archbishop was 'of a masterful temperament, with all the intolerance and all the impatience of youth.' He suggests that even without the evidence of the London papyrus 1914, one need feel little hesitation in accepting as at least partially true the accusation of his enemies that Athanasius persecuted the Melitians.<sup>32</sup> On top of this claim, Bell nevertheless cited only two pieces of evidence that mentioned the misconduct of Athanasius.<sup>33</sup> They are the Arian charges recorded by Sozomen whom Bell believes to have seen the minutes of the Synod of Tyre<sup>34</sup> and the similar allegations made in a letter of the Oriental Council of Sardica preserved by Hilary of Poitiers.<sup>35</sup> Here, one must note here that these two pieces of evidence are both speculative and non-specific. Besides the charges about Macarius' breaking a sacred chalice and the murdering of Arsenius, which were all dismissed by Athanasius, they provide no other solid information about the oppression and violence of the bishop. Also, both the Synods of Tyre and of Sardica, from which the two records are drawn, were conducted and attended largely by those who were antagonistic to Athanasius. Their justness and validity is a matter of suspicion. On this account, it is not surprising that many twentieth-century scholars have published their historical works according to the traditional view without mentioning these new accusations. J. G. Davies for example kept calling the Arians a 'heresy' and judged them as having made a series of 'false charges' to discredit the bishop in his *The Early Christian Church*.<sup>36</sup>

How was the prevalent view on Athanasius established in scholarly circle? A good demonstration on this question is the work authored by T. G. Elliott in 1996. In the preface, Elliott himself writes clearly that he has borrowed ideas largely from Barnes and Hanson.<sup>37</sup> At the very beginning of his book, Elliott gives his preconception about the character of Athanasius and portrays him as a 'skilled propagandist'.<sup>38</sup> When dealing with the interpretation of the London papyrus 1914, he says, 'I have accepted the conclusion of Bell.'<sup>39</sup> He uses Philostorgius' narrative heavily in his historical reconstruction.<sup>40</sup> Throughout his work, Barnes and Hanson are cited numerous times in the footnotes, most

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<sup>32</sup> H. I. Bell, 'Athanasius: A Chapter in Church History,' *The Congregational Quarterly* 3 (1925):164.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 166. In his introduction to the Melitian papyri, Bell also cited these two documents as his only evidence. Cf. Bell, *Jews and Christians in Egypt*, p.47.

<sup>34</sup> Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.22, 2.25 (PG 67, col.989, 1001-1004).

<sup>35</sup> Hilary, *Fragmenta Historica* A 4.1.6 (CSEL 65, p.53).

<sup>36</sup> J. G. Davies, *The Early Christian Church* (London, 1965), p.166, 178. A similar attitude was widely held by most scholars of the mid-twenty century. For a list of some of these scholars, see part A of the Introduction of this thesis.

<sup>37</sup> T. G. Elliott, *The Christianity of Constantine the Great* (Scranton, 1996), p.ix.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p.4.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.291. From the footnotes, it is clear that Elliott values the papyrus highly according to Frend, Hanson and Barnes (p.290 fn.20).

<sup>40</sup> Elliott, *The Christianity of Constantine the Great*, p.178, 179, 203, 209, 230, 231, 244, 324.

of which are used as supportive evidences for Elliott's choices.<sup>41</sup> Although being a continuous process in which many scholars such as W. H. C. Frend have contributed, the popularity of the modern critical view on Athanasius is largely an achievement of the recent publications of R. P. C. Hanson and T. D. Barnes in these two decades.

Amongst various works, Hanson's *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God* may be said to be one of the most extensive studies of the Arian controversy. Responding to the traditional view, he says, 'We might believe the direct denial that Athanasius ever hurt or imprisoned anyone, made by the Egyptian bishops in 338. We might dismiss the allegations of the Council of Tyre, and treat the accusations made against Athanasius by the Eastern bishops, at Serdica in 343, with the same scepticism as we read the defence of him made at the same moment by the Western bishops, or with even more. All these are statements made for propaganda purposes by very much interested parties...But, accidentally or providentially, we have available to us contemporary evidence which we cannot possibly dismiss as invention or exaggeration or propaganda, to decide this point.'<sup>42</sup> Hanson treats the Melitian letter presented in the London papyrus as a factual account and gives it an extraordinarily high historical value. In his extensive discussion, two reasons for his high valuation of the letter may be discerned: it is a private missive not intended for publication or propaganda,<sup>43</sup> and its evidence agrees closely with the list of anti-Athanasian charges given by Sozomen.<sup>44</sup> Based largely on this evidence, he judges Athanasius as the most problematic figure causing the unhappy controversy in the fourth-century church.<sup>45</sup>

In 1993, T. D. Barnes published his weighty book *Athanasius and Constantius*, which aims at probing behind Athanasius' misrepresentations and discovering the true nature of the ecclesiastical history and the ecclesiastical politics of the fourth century.<sup>46</sup> In the introduction, Barnes states explicitly that his study 'starts from the presumption that

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<sup>41</sup> For example when evaluating a letter by Constantine and proving Athanasius of having provided forgeries, Elliott explained in the footnote, 'I agree with Barnes that the phrase in round brackets must be an editorial addition by Athanasius.' Elliott, *The Christianity of Constantine the Great*, p.299 fn.38. In his work, Elliott has cited Barnes and Hanson 98 and 30 times respectively, whereas he has only quoted Frend 11 times, Schwartz 11 times, and Seeck 8 times.

<sup>42</sup> Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, pp.251-252.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.252.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p.254. Sozomen here recorded that the Melitians accused Athanasius before Constantine of 'being the author of all the seditions and troubles that agitated the church (στάσεων καὶ θορύβων αἴτιον τῇ Ἐκκλησίᾳ γενόμενον), and of excluding those who were desirous of joining the church (ἐργοντα τοὺς βουλομένους εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν εἰσιέναι); and alleged that unanimity would be possible if this alone gave way (ἐξόν πάντας ὁμονοεῖν, εἰ τοῦτο μόνον συγχωρηθείη).' Besides, they also imputed to Athanasius and the bishops of his party 'all the bloodshed (φόνων), bonds (δεσμών), unjust blows (πληγῶν ἀδίκων), wounds (τραυμάτων), and conflagrations of churches (ἐμπρησμών ἐκκλησιῶν).' Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.22 (PG 67, col.989).

<sup>45</sup> Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p.273.

<sup>46</sup> Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, p.ix.

Athanasius consistently misrepresented central facts about his ecclesiastical career.<sup>47</sup> Focussing on Athanasius' long struggle with Constantius, Barnes tries to reconstruct the history of the Arian controversy with modern critical techniques of historical research. He rates one of Philostorgius' lost sources, the so-called Arian historiographer of the middle of the fourth century identified by P. Batiffol, as 'of the greatest importance.'<sup>48</sup> At the same time, Barnes values the London papyrus 1914 highly for the same reasons given by Hanson: it is a private letter 'never intended for publication.'<sup>49</sup> He uses it heavily to affirm the violence of the bishop and says, 'The chance find of a papyrus undoes much of Athanasius' pleading on his own behalf.'<sup>50</sup> Barnes' study is well documented and is widely acclaimed by reviewers. G. T. Dennis agrees that Barnes' presentation of his case is exhaustive and persuasive, and asks everyone interested in Athanasius to take cognisance of it.<sup>51</sup> G. C. Stead commends that it is a notable achievement. It adds enormously to our understanding of a critical epoch in the history of Christianity.<sup>52</sup> W. H. C. Frend even praises it as 'one of those rare books to which the term "essential reading" may be applied without reservation.'<sup>53</sup> Similarly, R. M. Grant believes that this work can hardly be replaced in the near future.<sup>54</sup>

Through reinterpretation of the orthodox documents with the help of Philostorgius' *Historia Ecclesiastica* and the London papyrus, modern critical scholars have now reconstructed a new version of the Arian controversy different from the traditional one. Though their rebuilt histories are sometimes different in certain key areas, they have similar negative views of Athanasius. Under their portraiture, the original noble image of this Alexandrian bishop was totally altered. He was 'disingenuous in his controversial methods and deficient in charity towards opponents.'<sup>55</sup> He practised 'systematic distortion of the events of 335'<sup>56</sup> and 'systematic use of violence.'<sup>57</sup> He had an 'embattled personality',<sup>58</sup> and his abuse of his opponents sometimes even reached 'the point of

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p.8.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. Barnes agrees with Hanson on his high valuation of the papyrus. At the end of his discussion above the papyrus, Barnes added an endnote that reads, 'On the "behaviour of Athanasius" and the importance of P. Lond. 1914, see now Hanson, *Search* (1988), 239-262.' Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, p.250 n.44.

<sup>50</sup> Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, p.32.

<sup>51</sup> G. T. Dennis, Review of Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, *ThSt* 55 (1994):785.

<sup>52</sup> G. C. Stead, Review of Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, *JThS* NS 45 (1994):725.

<sup>53</sup> W. H. C. Frend, Review of Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, *JEH* 45 (1994):688.

<sup>54</sup> R. M. Grant, Review of Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, *CH* 63 (1994):431.

<sup>55</sup> Bell, 'Athanasius: A Chapter in Church History,' p.161.

<sup>56</sup> Elliott, *The Christianity of Constantine the Great*, p.314.

<sup>57</sup> T. D. Barnes, 'The Career of Athanasius,' *StP* 21 (1989):395.

<sup>58</sup> Frend, 'Athanasius as an Egyptian Christian Leader in the Fourth Century,' p.21.



hysteria.’<sup>59</sup> He was ‘a hard, narrow-minded and self-righteous man, even more disagreeable a personality than his opponent Arius.’<sup>60</sup>

## 2. Alternative View on Athanasius

Although the prevalent view on Athanasius has become more and more popular, it is not heard without objection. For example, C. Kannengiesser argued in 1988, ‘A formidable bias of a new kind has been imposed on Athanasian studies by the simple fact that the Alexandrian bishop has been mainly approached during the twentieth century on the level of the general imperial context of his time.’ He criticises in the same article the historiographical approach of many modern critics. He denounces T. D. Barnes for having refused the Athanasian authenticity of the *V. Ant.* ‘without dedicating one single remark to Athanasius’ style and vocabulary as writer in this and other works attributed to him.’ He censures G. C. Stead, R. Gregg and D. Groh for having allowed themselves to evaluate the Athanasian position ‘without feeling compelled at all to study that position for its own sake.’ Also, he blames E. Schwartz and L. Duchesne for having produced whole books on Athanasius’ ecclesiastical career ‘without giving their readers a single hint about their interest in the Alexandrian bishop as a Christian believer, or even as a pastor in charge of the most numerous and most extended portion of the fourth century Christianity.’<sup>61</sup> Whether the above criticisms are valid or not is a matter of debate. But surely, the prevalent view on Athanasius proposed by modern critics is not the only option amongst scholars.

Amongst various attempts, the most systematic and comprehensive criticism of the prevalent view on Athanasius is D. W.-H. Arnold’s *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*. Arnold’s work is composed of two sections. The first one evaluates the sources for Athanasius’ early episcopate. Based on this initial consideration, he reconstructs the historical context of the Synod of Tyre in the second part. The first section of the book is especially relevant to our present discussion and so its arguments are analysed in detail here. Dealing with modern dispute about the character of the bishop, Arnold provides at the beginning of his discussion a historical survey on various interpretations of Athanasius. His survey is not chronological and shows an ingenious arrangement of the author. After listing the accusations made by modern critics, he goes back to the Athanasian scholarship of the nineteenth century. Here, he demonstrates that the traditional positive appraisal of the bishop was supported by numerous weighty scholars. They include, for example, J. H. Newman, whom F. L. Cross praised as

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<sup>59</sup> Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p.243.

<sup>60</sup> D. Bowder, *The Age of Constantine and Julian* (London, 1978), p.73.

<sup>61</sup> Kannengiesser, ‘St. Athanasius of Alexandria Rediscovered: His Political and Pastoral Achievement,’ pp.69-70.



possessing the greatest knowledge of Athanasius in his age,<sup>62</sup> and J. M. Neale who made use of almost all the sources available to the modern church historian in his chronicle of the Alexandrian patriarchs.<sup>63</sup> In this process, Arnold queries the objectivity of modern Athanasian historians and the validity of their negative view.<sup>64</sup>

W. Rusch suggests in an essay that three sources are essential and must be consulted in the research for historical Athanasius. They are the historical reports of Philostorgius, the evidence of the London papyrus, and the criticisms that Gregory Nazianzen answered in his *Oratio* 21.<sup>65</sup> In accordance with this claim, Arnold examines these three sources one by one. Concerning Philostorgius' *Historia Ecclesiastica*, his treatment may be divided into three parts, namely the creditability of the work, the reliability of its account about the consecration of Athanasius, and the legitimacy of the charge made. Arnold first queries the appropriateness of modern critics' heavy reliance on its records. He points out that Philostorgius' history has long been recognised as a biased Arian source. This negative judgement may clearly be seen from the comments by Photius.<sup>66</sup> Besides, the fragments that remain are patently inaccurate in many places. Philostorgius for example states that Gregory the Cappadocian was consecrated and sent to Alexandria to take Athanasius' place at the second sitting of the 335 Synod of Tyre, which in fact did not take place until 341.<sup>67</sup> The second task Arnold wants to achieve is to call into question the use of Philostorgius' report as a reliable witness concerning the ordination of Athanasius. On this point, he remarks that the report was written, along with the other histories of Socrates and Sozomen, a full hundred years after the events under discussion and was based upon uncertain and biased Arian sources. The consecration account of Philostorgius is only one among many such Arian, Eusebian, and Melitian accounts. No two of these non-orthodox accounts agree, either as concerning a general outline of events or in their specific details.<sup>68</sup> Arnold's final task relating to Philostorgius' *Historia Ecclesiastica* is to evaluate the legitimacy of the charge on the ordination of Athanasius. He examines the problem in three areas: pre-Athanasian consecration practices in the church of Alexandria, proper and improper methods of

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<sup>62</sup> Newman, *Select Treatises of St. Athanasius in Controversy with the Arians*, vol.1, p.vi; and Cross, *The Study of Athanasius*, p.10.

<sup>63</sup> Neale, *A History of the Holy Eastern Church: The Patriarchate of Alexandria*, vol.1.

<sup>64</sup> Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, pp.11-20.

<sup>65</sup> Rusch, 'A la recherche de l'Athanase historique,' pp.161-177.

<sup>66</sup> Photius, *Bibliotheca* 40 (Henry, pp.23-25); see also part A.1 of this chapter.

<sup>67</sup> Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, pp.25-28; and Philostorgius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.11 (GCS 21, p.24).

<sup>68</sup> Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, pp.28-35. In addition to Philostorgius' report, Arnold also examined the relevant accounts found in Socrates' *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Sozomen's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Epiphanius' *Panarion*, Gregory Nazianzen's *Oratio* 21, *Apophthegmata Patrum* 78, index to *Ep. Fest.*, and Athanasius' *Apologia Secunda*. As a result, he finds that while the pro-Athanasian records are in general consistent, no two of the anti-Athanasian reports agree.

consecration and canonical revision and clarification at the Council of Nicaea, and Melitian involvement in the Alexandrian episcopal election of AD 328. After a series of examinations, Arnold concludes that the ordination of Athanasius seemingly has nothing improper both according to the traditional Alexandrian practices and the fourth canon of Nicaea. The account of the consecration given by Philostorgius is defective both in the details that are offered and in its general reporting of events and personalities. Philostorgius apparently so distorts the image of Athanasius that it is difficult to find any kind of true historical representation of the Alexandrian bishop in his entire report.<sup>69</sup>

While many modern scholars rest their critical evaluation of the character of Athanasius largely on Bell's interpretation of the London papyrus 1914, some scholars such as E. A. Judge and S. R. Pickering have attempted to place it within the wider social context of its time. As a result, questions have been raised about the papyrus that Bell has left unanswered.<sup>70</sup> Following them, Arnold first published his re-evaluation of the papyrus briefly in his 1989 article in *Studia Patristica*, and then in more detail in his 1991 book. He presents three major arguments. Firstly, Bell's interpretation of the letter is based upon a somewhat simplistic view of the religious situation in Egypt during the decade following Athanasius' consecration. He appears to assume that there were only two rival groups active in Egypt during that period, namely the Melitians and the Athanasians. He fails to take into consideration any of the other dissident groups, such as the Colluthians, the Heraiscaeans, and the Manichaeans. He also fails to take account of the relatively large number of Melitian bishops who gave their loyalty to Athanasius after the death of Alexander.<sup>71</sup> There is also evidence to suggest the existence of independent Melitian monastic communities who appear to have been free of both the Athanasian and the Melitian hierarchy and were accountable only to their community Apa.<sup>72</sup> It appears that there was a high degree of ill-will between these Melitian and former Melitian communities. The events described in the London papyrus 1914 possibly have very little to do with Athanasius himself, and it may instead be a description of certain incidents in the protracted struggle between rival Melitian communities. Although Bell assumes Athanasius to be the proponent of the attacks described in the second section of the letter, Arnold argues that the mutilated state of the papyrus and the almost incomprehensible

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<sup>69</sup> Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, pp.36-62.

<sup>70</sup> E. A. Judge and S. R. Pickering, 'Papyrus Documentation of Church and Community in Egypt to the Mid-Fourth Century,' *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 20 (1977):47-71.

<sup>71</sup> Arnold points out that at least twelve Melitian bishops are identified as Athanasius' supporters at the Synod of Tyre. This may be seen by a comparison of the *Breviarium Melitii* and the list of signatories on the petitions presented by Athanasius' supporters at the Synod of Tyre. Cf. *Apol. Ar.* 71, 78 (PG 25, col.376-377, 392).

<sup>72</sup> Examples of these monastic communities may be found in the London papyrus 1917. Cf. Bell, *Jews and Christians in Egypt*, pp.80-88.

grammar of the author make such identification highly suspect.<sup>73</sup> Secondly, Bell's choice of words in the preparation of his English translation of the text is questionable. For example, the phrase that Bell translates 'the adherents of Athanasius' (οἱ διαφέροντες Ἀθανασίου) in the description of the first attack in Nicopolis may be incorrect.<sup>74</sup> The word διαφέροντες may indicate either relationship or a distinct sense of difference. Indeed, the primary sense of the word διαφέρω is to differ. It is therefore possible to speak of 'those who differed from Athanasius' rather than 'those who belonged to Athanasius.' If so, the entire thrust of the letter may be completely changed.<sup>75</sup> Finally, Bell's dating of the papyrus to May-June of AD 335 is also problematic. In his process of elimination, several assumptions are made.<sup>76</sup> Here, Arnold disputes that these assumptions are wholly favourable to Bell's thesis, but are unsatisfactory in the light of more recent research. For example, Bell assumed that Athanasius spent his first years as bishop of Alexandria in relative security. However, more recent studies have indicated that exactly the opposite was more likely the case.<sup>77</sup> The events recorded in the papyrus may fit into several occasions in the early episcopate of Athanasius. Many different interpretations of the letter are possible.<sup>78</sup> Arnold concludes at the end that although there is still a possibility that Bell's initial interpretation and translation of the papyrus is correct, one must 'at least insert a note of doubt and caution in the use of the document as proof positive of the violent nature of Athanasius's character.'<sup>79</sup>

The last evidence Arnold examined is the so-called anti-Athanasian criticisms, which W. G. Rusch and F. M. Young proposed through their reinterpretation of Gregory Nazianzen's *Oratio* 21.<sup>80</sup> Regarding these criticisms, Arnold provided three judgements. First, they are mainly built upon the disputable accounts of Philostorgius and the traditional interpretation of the London papyrus 1914. Besides, the argument of Rusch

<sup>73</sup> D. W.-H. Arnold, 'Sir Harold Idris Bell and Athanasius: A Reconsideration of *London Papyrus 1914*,' *StP* 21 (1989):380-381; and Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, pp.79-82.

<sup>74</sup> Bell, *Jews and Christians in Egypt*, p.58, 61.

<sup>75</sup> Arnold, 'Sir Harold Idris Bell and Athanasius: A Reconsideration of *London Papyrus 1914*,' pp.381-382; and Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, pp.82-85. For the meaning of διαφέροντες, see 'διαφέρω,' *PGL*, pp.362-363; and H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, ed., 'διαφερόντως,' *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford, 1940), 1:417. Both lexicons suggest that the primary sense of the word is 'differently from.'

<sup>76</sup> Bell used a method of elimination to date the papyrus. His entire process is recorded in Bell, *Jews and Christians in Egypt*, pp.54-57.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. H. Nordberg, *Athanasius and the Emperor* (Helsinki, 1963), pp.18-19; Barnard, 'Two Notes on Athanasius,' pp.351-352; and Martin, 'Athanasie et les Mélétiens,' pp.32-61.

<sup>78</sup> Arnold, 'Sir Harold Idris Bell and Athanasius: A Reconsideration of *London Papyrus 1914*,' pp.382-383; and Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, pp.85-86.

<sup>79</sup> Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, p.87. Bell himself also admits that, 'parts of our letters are by no means clear and admit of more than one interpretation.' Bell, *Jews and Christians in Egypt*, p.53.

<sup>80</sup> Rusch, 'A la recherche de l'Athanasie historique,' p.176; Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, p.67.

does not seem to take into account the literary genre to which *Oratio* 21 belongs. The listing of Athanasius' virtues by Gregory need not be seen as an answer to contrary opinions but merely as a rhetorical device. Lastly, Rusch's and Young's proposal appears to have deviated from the original intent of Gregory. Their contention is essentially an argument based upon silence. Amongst various scholarly suggestions about the purpose of the panegyric, theirs is the most hypothetical and the least persuasive.<sup>81</sup>

After re-evaluating the above three anti-Athanasian sources, Arnold reconstructed the history of the fourth-century controversy taking into account different related literary evidence. His work is minute and complicated. We only highlight his investigations relating to the two major accusations against Athanasius here. Concerning the charge about his consecration, Arnold judges that Philostorgius' narrative is just one of the random Arian and Melitian calumnies against Athanasius. According to the extant ancient sources, it seems that Alexander had chosen Athanasius as his successor.<sup>82</sup> However, Athanasius was not in Alexandria at the time of Alexander's death.<sup>83</sup> There appears to have been an attempt at usurpation by the Melitians in his absence. Within a short time, however, Athanasius returned to Alexandria where a good number of bishops had already assembled and were being entreated by the people to elect Athanasius.<sup>84</sup> Owing to certain reasons, the Melitian bishops were apparently excluded completely from any further part in the election. In June 328, Athanasius was elected by a majority of the gathered bishops and was ordained in accordance with the fourth canon of Nicaea.<sup>85</sup> Regarding the charge about Athanasius' use of violence, the key issue rests on the reason for his first exile. After a series of explorations, Arnold observes that the exile of Athanasius, as well as of the Melitian bishop John Arcaph, probably had little to do with the decrees of Tyre. Instead, both of them were impediments to the unity of the Eastern Church and the inclusiveness that the emperor desired.<sup>86</sup> Athanasius himself later contended that the emperor had banished him so that he would be protected from the hostility and hatred of his enemies.<sup>87</sup> The fact that Constantine did not accede to the wishes of the Eusebian bishops in regard to the vacant see of Alexandria indicates that

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<sup>81</sup> Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, pp.89-94. For the purposes of the *Oratio* 21, see J. Mossay, ed. and tr., *Grégoire de Nazianze, Discours 20-23*, SC 270 (Paris, 1980), pp.92-95; and R. Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus: Rhetor and Philosopher* (Oxford, 1969), pp.109-111.

<sup>82</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion* 68.7 (GCS 37, p.147).

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.; Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.17 (PG 67, col.976).

<sup>84</sup> *Apol. Ar.* 6 (PG 25, col.260).

<sup>85</sup> Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, pp.59-61. See also Barnard, 'Two Notes on Athanasius,' p.349.

<sup>86</sup> This reason was given by Socrates and Sozomen. Cf. Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.35 (PG 67, col.172); and Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.28 (PG 67, col.1017).

<sup>87</sup> *Apol. Ar.* 88 (PG 25, col.408).



Athanasius' claim may possibly be true.<sup>88</sup> Arnold concludes at the end of his book, 'If the many accusations against Athanasius during the early years of his episcopate cannot be dismissed out of hand, they must at least be considered unproved.'<sup>89</sup>

Surprisingly, although Arnold's view on Athanasius is significantly different from that of modern critics like Barnes, his work is also widely acclaimed by reviewers. G. H. Ettlinger agrees that his arguments are persuasive.<sup>90</sup> C. Badger commends the book as 'organised and well written, given the number of disparate and difficult issues treated.'<sup>91</sup> R. Yanney applauds that Arnold has admirably succeeded in reviewing the enormous primary and secondary sources of the early episcopate of Athanasius. He left 'no stone unturned' in proving that his critics had not looked carefully at the documents they relied upon, and had ignored the historiographical context of the Egyptian Church at the time.<sup>92</sup> R. Valantasis even praises Arnold's historiographical method as 'exemplary.' His treatment of the secondary papyrological material is particularly instructive, while his careful listing of sources and their evaluation models good historiographical technique.<sup>93</sup>

### 3. Evaluation of Modern Study of the Historical Athanasius

From the above discussions, it is clear that the scholarly debate on the true historical picture of Athanasius is not yet fully settled. Coincident with the prevalence of modern critical view, a strong opposing force still exists amongst scholars. A careful examination of their viewpoints will show that the evidential support is not completely one-sided. Both views have their own strengths as well as weaknesses. In accordance with their main arguments, a few comments may be made here.

Concerning Arnold's book, one must admit that it is well presented and the author has carefully reviewed one by one many primary sources. However, it seems to me that some of his arguments are not convincing enough. Regarding Philostorgius' *Historia Ecclesiastica*, one of the major strategies of Arnold is to challenge the creditability of its accounts. Truly, I agree that Philostorgius' record is not unbiased. Nevertheless, it is still

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<sup>88</sup> Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, pp.170-173. The fact that two of Athanasius' supporters within the imperial household, Dalmatius the Censor and Ablabius the Prefect, were killed in a purge following the death of Constantine may suggest that the risk of Athanasius' being slain by his enemies really existed. Cf. D. W.-H. Arnold, 'Plots and Accusations: Athanasius and the Death of Constantine,' *StP* 26 (1993):347-353.

<sup>89</sup> Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, p.186.

<sup>90</sup> G. H. Ettlinger, Review of Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, *ThSt* 53 (1992):181-182.

<sup>91</sup> C. M. Badger, Review of Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, *AnThR* 74 (1992):390.

<sup>92</sup> R. Yanney, Review of Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 1 (1993):317-319.

<sup>93</sup> R. Valantasis, Review of Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, *Critical Review of Books in Religion* 6 (1993):343-345.



a valuable ancient source, which should be included in the reconstruction of the historical picture of Athanasius. Also, it appears that modern critics have not used it uncritically. Amongst various arguments, the three Arnold uses to question Bell's interpretation of the London papyrus 1914 are particularly arguable. Firstly, when compared with other ancient archives, the London papyrus is a relatively well-preserved one. Mutilation is not a good excuse for rejecting the interconnection between its sections. Arnold is right in pointing out that Bell has oversimplified the religious situation in Egypt. However, in view of the negative description of Athanasius in the second section, it is very difficult to attribute the violent incident recorded in the papyrus to rival Melitian communities. Secondly, although the primary meaning of διαφέροντες is to differ, the use of this word to denote 'adherents' is not unusual. Bell's translation can fit well into its context. The interpretation of οἱ διαφέροντες Ἀθανασίου as 'those who differed from Athanasius' seems improbable. Finally, Arnold criticises the assumptions Bell used to date the papyrus. Possibly, he is right in arguing that the events mentioned in the Melitian letter may fit into several occasions. Nonetheless, does this have any significant effect on the use of the papyrus as evidence proving the misbehaviour of Athanasius? Even if all the points made by Arnold have been taken into consideration, Bell's interpretation of the letter remains the most possible and natural one. On this account, Barnes is not unreasonable in calling Arnold's work as 'an unsuccessful attempt to impugn the inferences drawn by Bell.'<sup>94</sup> What Arnold has achieved is just as he himself says inserting a note of doubt in the use of the document as a proof.

As to the prevalent critical view, again it is not absolutely unshakeable. Although Barnes has examined in minute detail the ups and downs of Athanasius' long episcopal career, it is undeniable that his arguments in proving the violent personality of the bishop still rest heavily on the evidence provided by the London papyrus. Both Hanson and Barnes have given the document an extraordinarily high historical value. However, is such valuation valid? It seems to me that the two reasons Hanson used to fix the supreme status of the papyrus, which are supported by Barnes, are both problematic. According to the text, the recipients of the letter, Paiêou and Patabeit (Παιηοῦ καὶ Παταβεῖτ), are given the title 'Apa' (ἄπα) and are called 'father' (πατήρ).<sup>95</sup> They were assuredly dominant abbots or leaders of certain monastic groups. Paiêou was also given the title 'elder' (πρεσβύτερος) in the papyri 1915 and 1916, where he was asked to financially support an impoverished brother.<sup>96</sup> From the papyrus 1917, we know that he was regarded at that time as a spiritual patron whose intercession was highly valued.<sup>97</sup> Every time he was

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<sup>94</sup> Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, p.250 n.42.

<sup>95</sup> Bell, *Jews and Christians in Egypt*, p.58, 61.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.72-80.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.80-86.

greeted with other people, his name was invariably put in the foremost position.<sup>98</sup> The name of Patabeit appears also in the papyrus 1920, where he was again greeted first and then followed by other brethren.<sup>99</sup> The recipients of the letter presented in the papyrus 1914 were not individual monks without any political stature. Besides, at the end of the papyrus, multitudes of people were greeted. Clearly, the letter was to be widely circulated amongst different parties. The assumption Hanson made is very questionable. There is no real ground for rejecting the possibility that the papyrus was a propagandist letter.<sup>100</sup> Hanson's second reason is equally unconvincing. One should note that what Hanson used here to prove the historicity of the records in the papyrus is the list of Melitian charges against Athanasius restated by Sozomen, which Sozomen himself clearly disapproved.<sup>101</sup> The logic of Hanson may be said to be that the Melitian accusations against Athanasius recorded in the papyrus 1914 are believable because they match closely with the Melitian accusations recorded elsewhere. This is obviously a circular argument. Melitian allegation is used as a proof of the credibility of the allegation itself. If it is true that the accusers, as Sozomen suggested, intentionally calumniated Athanasius before Constantine, I see no reason why they could not write the same charges in their own missives. If the same circular argument was applicable to Athanasius, all things he wrote would automatically become historical truth since his defences against and attacks towards his enemies were too often reiterated by other ancient writers. Hanson's and Barnes' extraordinarily high valuation of the London papyrus 1914 is problematic, and their regarding the Melitian letter as a factual account is questionable. We cannot ignore the records given in the papyrus, but it can at most be treated as one of the unproven anti-Athanasian evidences transmitted from the accusers.

It is not the intention, and also out of the scope, of this study to review every individual aspect about the Arian controversy. However, the above examples are sufficient to demonstrate that the prevalent picture of the historical Athanasius portrayed by modern critics is not unchallengeable. The evaluation of the character and career of Athanasius is a good example demonstrating that historical interpretation is often not free from subjective judgement. The traditional view of Athanasius appears too sympathetic towards the bishop. Earlier Christian writers frequently just rely on the orthodox sources and neglect the contrasting accounts given by the opposing parties. Exactly the reverse

<sup>98</sup> The same phenomenon appears in all the letters preserved in papyri 1916 to 1919.

<sup>99</sup> Bell, *Jews and Christians in Egypt*, pp.92-93. The papyrus reads, 'In the Lord hail (ΧΑΙΡΕ). I greet my father Patabeit (ΠΑΠΑΤΑΒΕΙΤ); I greet the little Paciêw and all the brethren that are with you...'

<sup>100</sup> Amongst the Athanasian apologetic writings, some, such as *Epistula ad Serapionem de Morte Arii*, are private missives and some, such as *Historia Arianorum ad Monachos*, are treatises directed to the monks. While regarding nearly all these works as propaganda and depreciating their historical value, Hanson treats the papyrus 1914 alone as a factual account. He seems to have a double standard here.

<sup>101</sup> Sozomen himself calls these Melitian accusations a 'calumny' (συκοφαντία). Cf. Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.22 (PG 67, col.992).

course is taken by the modern critics. While prejudging most pro-Athanasian sources as biased, they believe nearly all Arian and Melitian records. On the one hand, they are very censorious towards Athanasius. On the other hand, they are warm-hearted towards his enemies. It is difficult to say who is right and who is wrong. Today, more and more modern scholars have adopted a hostile attitude towards Athanasius. However, as we have shown, this is not the only option. Historical evidences are not one-sided. Both positive and negative views are equally possible. They all have their own viewpoints. Which one is more coherent with the spirituality we have found in the previous chapters? This is what we are going to explore in the following sections.

## B. Application of His Spirituality in His Life

In the intense persecution against the church during the time of Diocletian and Maximin, a large number of Egyptian bishops including Peter of Alexandria were forced to leave their dioceses. About 305, Melitius, who appears to have been newly appointed bishop of Lycopolis in place of the apostatised Apollonius, stepped in to perform Peter's duties. Possibly due to practical needs, he ordained priests in the 'empty' dioceses, which was subsequently strongly objected to by the original bishops.<sup>102</sup> Returning to the city, Peter convened a synod and excommunicated Melitius.<sup>103</sup> As persecution continued, Melitius was banished to the Palestinian mines. Under the edict of toleration promulgated by the dying eastern emperor Galerius in 311, he returned to Egypt and initiated a schismatic hierarchy with clergy of his own ordination.<sup>104</sup> This Melitian church continued to develop and maintained itself as a rival to the orthodox church during the episcopate of Achillas and Alexander after the martyrdom of Peter.<sup>105</sup>

Just about ten years after the Melitian schism, another crisis arose in the Egyptian church. A Libyan presbyter called Arius, who was a disciple of Lucian of Antioch and appointed to the church in Baucalis, came forward as a champion of subordinationism.<sup>106</sup> Modern studies of Arius suggest that he was a well-educated scholar with a logical mind

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<sup>102</sup> *Codex Verona* LX, critical text in F. H. Kettler, 'Der melitianische Streit in Ägypten,' *ZNW* 35 (1936):155-193. See also Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, p.33, 259 n.40.

<sup>103</sup> *Apol. Ar.* 59 (PG 25, col.356).

<sup>104</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion* 68.3 (GCS 37, p.143). Epiphanius suggests that the schism arose over Peter's lax policy for the return of the lapsed to the church. However, modern studies have shown that it was not the main cause. Cf. Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, p.35. For detailed discussions of the Melitian schism, see T. Vivian, *St. Peter of Alexandria: Bishop and Martyr* (Philadelphia, 1988), pp.15-50; and S. T. Carroll, 'The Melitian Schism: Coptic Christianity and the Egyptian Church,' Ph.D. diss., Miami University, 1989.

<sup>105</sup> *Apol. Ar.* 59 (PG 25, col.356); *Ad Aeg. Lib.* 23 (PG 25, col.592).

<sup>106</sup> Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.15 (PG 67, col.904-905).

deeply rooted in the Alexandrian philosophical tradition.<sup>107</sup> His prominent theological view soon provoked the objection of Alexander, who had publicly declared the co-existence of the Son with the Father. He convened a council of bishops from Egypt and Libya in about 318, and deposed Arius and all his adherents.<sup>108</sup> Nevertheless, Arius immediately sought support amongst other pupils of Lucian, notably Eusebius of Nicomedia, as well as many other bishops of the East.<sup>109</sup> The dispute quickly spread. Knowing this situation, Constantine wrote to Alexander and Arius exhorting them to be reconciled and sent Hosius as a peacemaker. The attempt unfortunately failed.<sup>110</sup>

At the 325 Council of Nicaea, both Melitian and Arian controversies were raised in discussion. With the explanation of its wording by Constantine, the Nicene Creed was constituted and subscribed by nearly all the gathered bishops, including those who formerly sympathised with Arius.<sup>111</sup> Arius was expelled with some of his adherents, and his theological view elucidated in the pamphlet *Thalia* was condemned.<sup>112</sup> Melitius on the other hand was deprived of episcopal authority, but allowed to retain the title of bishop. The Melitian clergy however were permitted to continue their functions, but in a position subordinate to those ordained by Alexander. If legally elected, they might succeed the latter through the ordination of the Alexandrian bishop.<sup>113</sup>

The Council of Nicaea did not bring peace to the church. Although Eusebius of Nicomedia and other Arian bishops had subscribed to the creed, they continued to fight for Arius in order to have him readmitted to the Alexandrian church. T. D. Barnes reports that these Arian allies quickly gained an ascendancy in the eastern church such that they

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<sup>107</sup> Williams even called him 'a committed theological conservative.' Cf. Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, p.175. A similar view is given in C. Kannengiesser, 'Alexander and Arius of Alexandria: the last ante-Nicene theologians,' *AA*, chap.IV; reprinted from *Miscelánea En Homenaje Al P. Antonio Orbe Compostellanum*, vol.35 no.1-2 (Santiago de Compostela, 1990), pp.391-403.

<sup>108</sup> *Urkunde* 4b; Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.6 (PG 67, col.44).

<sup>109</sup> These bishops include for example Eusebius of Caesarea, Theodotus of Laodicea, Paulinus of Tyre, Athanasius of Anazarbus, Gregorius of Berytus, and Aetius of Lydda. Cf. *Urkunde* 1; Theodoret, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.4 (PG 82, col.912-913); Epiphanius, *Panarion* 69.5-6 (GCS 37, pp.156-157).

<sup>110</sup> *Urkunde* 17; Eusebius, *Vita Imperatoris Constantini* 2.63-73 (PG 20, col.1036-1048); Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.7-8 (PG 67, col.53-60). For modern discussions of the history and controversy in this pre-Nicene period, see Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, pp.48-61; and Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, pp.15-16.

<sup>111</sup> *Urkunde* 22; Eusebius, *Epistula Nicaenae Synodi* (PG 20, col.1536-1544). The letter was appended by Athanasius in his *De Decretis*, and was later reiterated in Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.8 (PG 67, col.69-77) and Theodoret, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.12 (PG 82, col.948).

<sup>112</sup> Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.9 (PG 67, col.84); Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.21 (PG 67, col.921); Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.5 (PL 21, col.472). For discussions of the content of the *Thalia*, see Stead, 'The *Thalia* of Arius and the Testimony of Athanasius,' pp.20-52; R. D. Williams, 'The Quest of the Historical *Thalia*,' *AHTR*, pp.1-35; and S. G. Hall, 'The *Thalia* of Arius in Athanasius' Accounts,' *AHTR*, pp.37-58.

<sup>113</sup> Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.9 (PG 67, col.80-81); Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.24 (PG 67, col.928); Theodoret, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.8 (PG 82, col.929). For a modern study of the council, see C. Luibhéid, *The Council of Nicaea*, Galway, 1982.



were even able to depose in 327 a leading anti-Arian bishop Eustathius of Antioch and many other orthodox priests at a council presided over by Eusebius of Caesarea. All were replaced by men of whose opinions Eusebius presumably approved.<sup>114</sup> Though many details of this report are still under debate, the great intimidation of the Arians to the Alexandrian hierarchy is certain.<sup>115</sup> At the same time, the majority of the Melitian priests were also unhappy with the results of the 325 ecumenical council. W. R. Telfer made an observation here that Melitius before submitting the *Breviarium Melitii* to Alexander had to spend a long period of time to communicate the terms of the synodal letter to each of his suffragans and persuade them to accept.<sup>116</sup> The fact that certain Melitians attempted to elect an archbishop of their own after the death of Alexander suggests that this effort of reconciliation at least partially failed.<sup>117</sup> To understand the influence of spirituality on one's own life, we must first distinguish spontaneous activities from the constrained ones. From the historical background discussed above, it seems that at the time when Athanasius was consecrated onto the throne of Saint Mark, an extraordinarily heavy burden was imposed on him. He had to face simultaneously internal strife from the Melitians and external attack from the Arians. All these threats were left over by his predecessor and were out of his own control.

## 1. Episcopal and Literary Career

Quoting a testimony of Apollinaris of Laodicea, Sozomen reports that Athanasius at first sought to avoid the honour by flight (ἀποφυγεῖν πειραθῆναι) after being appointed as the successor of the dying Alexander.<sup>118</sup> This account has long been regarded as a chimerical narrative designed purely for commendation, and is neglected by most modern church historians.<sup>119</sup> However, if one considers seriously the background and spirituality of Athanasius, the record may not be absolutely impossible. When talking about flight from episcopal appointment, one may immediately recall the example of Dracontius.

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<sup>114</sup> Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, p.17.

<sup>115</sup> The existence of the 327 council is still denied by some scholars such as C. Luibhéid, and the date of Eustathius' deposition is maintained to be about 330 by many scholars like R. P. C. Hanson. Cf. C. Luibhéid, 'The Alleged Second Session of the Council of Nicaea,' *JEH* 34 (1983):165-174; and Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, pp.208-211.

<sup>116</sup> W. R. Telfer, 'Meletius of Lycopolis and Episcopal Succession in Egypt,' *HThR* 48 (1955):234.

<sup>117</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion* 68.7, 69.11 (GCS 37, p.147, 161). For a discussion of the Melitians in the post-Nicene period, see Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, pp.56-61.

<sup>118</sup> Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.17 (PG 67, col.976).

<sup>119</sup> Parallel with Sozomen's account are two narratives provided by Epiphanius where Athanasius was recorded as having been sent away from Alexandria for church business. Cf. Epiphanius, *Panarion* 68.7, 69.11 (GCS 37, p.147, 161). Unfortunately, it appears that only the latter were seriously considered by scholars. Barnes for example basing himself on Epiphanius' records argues that when Alexander died on 17 April 328, Athanasius had been sent to court to deal with the emperor's persistence in urging the reinstatement of Arius. The account given by Sozomen is ignored. Cf. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, p.18.

Fearing that one would deteriorate spiritually by the episcopate, the abbot fled back to his monastery after being appointed the bishop of Hermopolis Parva. In his long letter, Athanasius listed several reasons to persuade the abbot to resume his office. Here, we should note that he nowhere queried the pertinence of Dracontius' worry.<sup>120</sup> Being an ascetic having good relations with Antony, Athanasius probably fled with the same anxiety.<sup>121</sup> Sozomen further records that he, although unwilling, was eventually constrained by Alexander (ἄκοντα βιασθῆναι πρὸς Ἀλεξάνδρου) to accept the bishopric.<sup>122</sup> No matter why Athanasius left, his assuming the episcopal office is a clear indication that he was himself finally convinced by the reasons he later gave to Dracontius. Amongst these reasons, two are predominant. On the one hand, episcopacy is a calling of God, obedience to which is the highest virtue for a Christian, as stated before.<sup>123</sup> Sozomen echoes with this view by saying repeatedly that the succession of Athanasius was 'by divine appointment' (οὐκ ἄθεε).<sup>124</sup> On the other hand, episcopacy is also essential for the spiritual advancement of the flock as well as the conversion of the heathens.<sup>125</sup> As we have seen, both of them are important objectives of the *Vita Antonii*.<sup>126</sup> Possibly inspired by the model of Antony, Athanasius treated guiding others on the way to God as one of his major goals. Presumably for the same purpose, he widely appointed monastic abbots as bishops.<sup>127</sup>

In an encyclical letter issued by several Egyptian bishops, Athanasius was reported as having been called by his congregation as 'one of the ascetics' (ἓνα τῶν ἀσκητῶν) at the time when he was elected.<sup>128</sup> Although the Alexandrian hierarchy was being severely threatened by Arians and Melitians, the new archbishop seems to have still put great effort on spiritual guidance. He directed the focus of his flock to the divine mystery of Christ and taught them the way to heaven. This tendency may be seen clearly from many hints in his extensive writings, especially the festal epistles. Up to the ninth century it was a custom of the Alexandrian bishop to send every year to all the churches under his power a paschal letter announcing the dates of Lent and Easter, and very often discussing also important ecclesiastical issues of the time. In order to reach in due time all the churches in Egypt and Libya, the festal epistles were usually prepared long in advance, probably just a few weeks after the celebration of the preceding Easter. The first bishop

<sup>120</sup> *Ad Drac.* 1 (PG 25, col.524); see also Chapter Two part C.2.c of this thesis.

<sup>121</sup> For the relationship of Athanasius and Antony, see Chapter Three part A.2 of this thesis.

<sup>122</sup> Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.17 (PG 67, col.976).

<sup>123</sup> *Ad Drac.* 4-5 (PG 25, col.528-529). See also Chapter Two part B.1, B.2.c and C.2.c of this thesis.

<sup>124</sup> Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.17 (PG 67, col.977).

<sup>125</sup> *Ad Drac.* 1-2 (PG 25, col.524-525). See also Chapter Two part C.2.c of this thesis.

<sup>126</sup> For the objectives of the *Vita Antonii*, see Chapter Three part B of this thesis.

<sup>127</sup> For Athanasius' appointment of monks as bishops, see *Ad Drac.* 7 (PG 25, col.532) and Chapter Two part C.2.c of this thesis.

<sup>128</sup> *Apol. Ar.* 6 (PG 25, col.260).

known to have written such letters is Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria in the mid-third century.<sup>129</sup> Since these paschal letters were to be read widely before all the believers in the episcopal territory, some archbishops would take these opportunities to publicise their own views. Cyril, bishop of Alexandria between 412 and 444, for example, frequently used intemperate polemics to defend the doctrine of Incarnation against the enemies and attack the infidelity of the Jews in the letters.<sup>130</sup> Compared with Cyril's impersonal and intolerant tone, Athanasius' festal epistles appear to be much more placid and amicable. He, as C. Kannengiesser says, not only speaks the language of a pastor in the letters, but also expresses his thoughts and emotions with the serene poetry of a contemplative person.<sup>131</sup> These pastoral writings witness the deepest concern of the Alexandrian bishop in his episcopal career and are examined in more detail here.

#### a) From consecration in 328 to the end of first exile in 337

Athanasius was ordained to the throne of Saint Mark on June 8, 328. His first paschal letter must have been composed in the first few months of his episcopacy. The new archbishop begins his pastoral communication with a warm invitation, 'Come, my beloved, the season (ربيع) calls (دعانا) us to keep the feast (العيد).'<sup>132</sup> Then, he put forward his spiritual ideal to his congregation immediately. Firstly, he demonstrates the necessity of noting the season and observing the time. It is a virtue modelled by the Lord in His incarnate life and advocated by the saints. He explains on this point, 'The God of all, the Creator of times and seasons, knows our affairs better than we do. As a good physician, He promotes the obedience in season.'<sup>133</sup> Based on the typology of the uses of trumpets in the Old Testament, he asks the readers to 'look upon the priestly trumpets of our Saviour.' He calls us at one time to war against the devil, and at another time to keep virginity, to exercise self-denial, to enjoy conjugal harmony, to fast and to feast.<sup>134</sup> Secondly, Athanasius deals with the theological significance of the spiritual feast. Virtues and vices are the food of the soul, which can eat and incline to either of the two according to its own will. If it is bent towards virtue, it will be nourished by virtues. But if it inclines downwards, it is nourished by sin. As the Lord is the heavenly bread, He is the

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<sup>129</sup> Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 7.20 (PG 20, col.681). A few fragments of Dionysius' festal letters remain and are edited in C. L. Feltoe, ed., *The Letters and Other Remains of Dionysius of Alexandria* (Cambridge, 1904), pp.64-91.

<sup>130</sup> Defence of the doctrine of Incarnation (Cf. Cyril, *Homiliae Paschales* 5, 8, 17, 27: PG 77, col.472-500, 553-577, 768-789, 928-941); and attack on the infidelity of the Jews (Cf. Cyril, *Homiliae Paschales* 1, 4, 10, 20, 21, 29: PG 77, col.401-425, 452-472, 605-633, 837-849, 849-857, 957-968).

<sup>131</sup> C. Kannengiesser, 'The Homiletic Festal Letters of Athanasius,' *AA*, chap.XV; reprinted from *Preaching in the Patristic Age*, ed. D. G. Hunter (New York, 1989), pp.73-100.

<sup>132</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 1.1 (Cureton, p.12).

<sup>133</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 1.1 (Cureton, p.12).

<sup>134</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 1.2-3 (Cureton, pp.13-14).

food of the saints. In order to turn people from vices, the Lord blows a warning trumpet and commands them to be nourished with the food of virtue. For not only does such a holy fast as this obtain pardon for souls, but it ‘prepares the saints and raises them above the earth.’<sup>135</sup> By quoting the receipts of divine visions of several biblical figures as example, he further emphasises, ‘The contemplation of God, and the word which is from Him, suffice to nourish those who hear and stand to them in place of all food.’<sup>136</sup> Lastly, he turns to the spiritual meaning of paschal feast as a whole. In the past, the Jews received their divine food, through the type, when they ate a lamb in Jerusalem in the Passover. However, since the coming of the Saviour, such shadow has come to an end. Having passed beyond the time of shadow and no longer performing rites under it, Christians should turn to the Lord. Hearing the sacred trumpet, they should no longer receive as food a material lamb, but the true Lamb that was slain. At the end, Athanasius advocates, ‘Let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.’<sup>137</sup>

As we can see, at the first time when the young archbishop addressed a festal message to the whole of the Egyptian Christians, he focused his attention mainly on the mystery of divine communion actualised by Jesus Christ. Having passed beyond the time of shadow of the Old Testament, having their souls nourished with the divine Word, and being purified by His precious blood, Christians should keep the paschal feast properly according to the heavenly manner. Here, several important points may be observed from this letter. Firstly, it is a piece of well-organised work and is not an arbitrary collection of standard teachings about paschal feast. Secondly, it is rich in theological thoughts. Intermingling with the paschal teachings is the doctrine of divine salvation through the incarnate Λόγος, which is invariably the central consideration of the bishop. Thirdly, its content is completely consistent with Athanasius’ theology and general spiritual teachings. These include for example the obedience to divine callings, the concept of spiritual food, the shadowy nature of the early Jerusalem, and the emphasis of the paschal feast. From these points, we may deduce that, at least in certain extent, the festal letters reflect the personal concerns of the bishop at time of issue. Surprisingly, throughout the first letter, he leaves no single word for the Arians or even for the Melitians who consecrated a rival bishop against him just a few months earlier.

In the second festal epistle for the 330 Easter, Athanasius moves forward to his teachings on spiritual advancement.<sup>138</sup> He first illustrates the importance of quietness and withdrawal through the examples of Abraham, Jacob, Moses and other patriarchs. Then,

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<sup>135</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 1.4-5 (Cureton, pp.14-16).

<sup>136</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 1.6 (Cureton, pp.16-17).

<sup>137</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 1.7-9 (Cureton, pp.17-19).

<sup>138</sup> That is formerly the 24<sup>th</sup> letter. Cf. Appendix E of this thesis.



he explains how these shadows of the withdrawal from darkness to marvellous light and the ascent to the city in heaven are realised in the Christian era. He seems to recommend monasticism to the church at large. After denouncing the ignorance and failure of the Jews in understanding the truth, the young bishop stimulates the congregation to prepare zealously to go to the festival as what the Lord has modelled. He ends this paschal letter with an exhortation of celebrating a perfect feast in heaven. The major focus here is again the mystery of divine communion with Christ in the paschal feast.<sup>139</sup>

A similar emphasis on keeping the feast may be found in the third festal epistle.<sup>140</sup> Here, Athanasius relates nearly everything about the paschal feast to Christ. It is He who guides Christians to the festival. It is also He who purifies their souls for the feast.<sup>141</sup> The Lord is actually Himself the feast. For this reason, the paschal feast is kept not with abandonment, but by the exercise of virtue, by the practice of temperance, by observing the purity of the fast, by watchfulness in prayers, by study of the Scriptures, and by distributing to the poor.<sup>142</sup> In this letter, we find the first possible reference to the Arians and the Melitians. After explaining the spiritual meaning of paschal feast, Athanasius prompts his flock to ‘be at peace with our enemies’ (ܠܚܬܠܝܬܝܢ ܒܥܕܝܐܢܝܢ).<sup>143</sup>

The first time Athanasius wrote in his festal epistle concerning his conflict with the enemies is in the period around the end of 331 when he was summoned by the emperor to the court to face the accusations the Melitians raised against him. He starts this paschal letter for the 332 Easter with an explanation of the deferred notification, ‘I send unto you, my beloved, late and beyond the accustomed time; yet I trust you will forgive the delay, on account of my protracted journey (ܠܬܬܝܬܝܢ ܠܡܕܝܢܐ), and because I have been tried with illness (ܕܡܝܬܝܢ ܠܡܕܝܢܐ).’<sup>144</sup> Having successfully cleared all the charges, he simply asked his supporters to sing a festal song of praise with him.<sup>145</sup> After that, he immediately directed the attention of the recipients back to the mystery of divine communion in the paschal feast and encouraged them to keep vigil unto contemplation of good things.<sup>146</sup> In the postscript, Athanasius stated that the paschal letter was sent from the imperial court by an attendant officer through the help of a prefect called Ablabius.<sup>147</sup> Why did he mention specifically in the letter the help of the prefect? Ablabius was at that time an important official who had won great influence over Constantine and was a leading

<sup>139</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 2 (CSCO 150, pp.37-42).  
<sup>140</sup> That is formerly the 14<sup>th</sup> letter. Cf. Appendix E of this thesis.  
<sup>141</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 3.2 (Cureton, p.32).  
<sup>142</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 3.5 (Cureton, p.32).  
<sup>143</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 3.5 (Cureton, p.32).  
<sup>144</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 4.1 (Cureton, p.32).  
<sup>145</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 4.1 (Cureton, p.33).  
<sup>146</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 4.2-4 (Cureton, pp.33-35).  
<sup>147</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 4.5 (Cureton, p.35).

member of the senate.<sup>148</sup> Possibly, Athanasius wanted to illustrate to his congregation that his status was not unstable and he was not unsupported by political force. If this deduction is correct, in addition to pastoral concern, the bishop may have paid certain degree of attention to the contemporary political struggle. However, at this stage, it seems that spiritual guidance remained his major interest. Except the prologue and a postscript, he generally kept silent about the aggression of the enemies.

The trace of Athanasius' dispute with the Arians and the Melitians again disappears altogether in the festal epistles between 333 and 335. In the fifth paschal letter, he urges his congregation repeatedly to live a virtuous life by imitating the saints, and to keep the soul pure by denying all bodily things and occupying the mind entirely with the Lord, so that they may be able to partake the Word.<sup>149</sup> The sixth letter has a length double that of the previous one. Here, he explicates in detail his concept of the paschal feast and encourages people to celebrate Easter not in an earthly manner, but as keeping festival in heaven (ܠܥܠܡܐ) with the angels (ܡܠܐܬܐ).<sup>150</sup> When Athanasius wrote the seventh letter, he seems to have sensed great pressure from his opponents. In spite of this, we do not find any hint that he reviled them publicly. Instead, he mentioned not even one word about them. In the festal epistle, he just contrasts righteous men with wicked men, and saints with sinners according to the scriptural teachings, and urges the recipients to live a godly life worthy of the heavenly calling.<sup>151</sup> Athanasius left Alexandria for the Council of Tyre in July 335 and was exiled to Gaul in November. Soon after the death of Constantine in May 337, he was allowed to return. The Syriac festal index tells us that he was not able to send paschal letters for the 336 and 337 Easter due to the exile.<sup>152</sup>

In this early period of episcopacy, Athanasius composed his representative doctrinal treatises *Contra Gentes* and *De Incarnatione*.<sup>153</sup> At the very beginning of this

<sup>148</sup> For the life of Ablabius, see Jones, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, vol.1, pp.3-4.

<sup>149</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 5.4-5 (Cureton, pp.38-40).

<sup>150</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 6.12 (Cureton, p.α). Camplani keeps this letter to 334, whereas Lorenz puts it to 345. Cf. Camplani, *Le Lettere festali di Atanasio di Alessandria*, pp.195-196; and Lorenz, *Der zehnte Osterfestbrief des Athanasius von Alexandrien*, pp.30-31. Both dates are possible. Its similarity with the seventh letter seems to suggest the earlier date.

<sup>151</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 7.2-10 (Cureton, pp.ι-μα). Camplani keeps this letter to 335, whereas Lorenz puts it to 346. Cf. Camplani, *Le Lettere festali di Atanasio di Alessandria*, pp.195-196; and Lorenz, *Der zehnte Osterfestbrief des Athanasius von Alexandrien*, pp.30-31. The message of the letter seems to match more closely the situation in 334-335.

<sup>152</sup> Index to *Ep. Fest.* 8-9 (SC 317, pp.232-234).

<sup>153</sup> This dual work had long been dated to the period between 318 and 323. In 1961, Nordberg challenged this traditional view and argued that the treatises were composed about 362 or 363. This proposal was soon rejected by Kannengiesser who re-dated the work about the year 336. In 1982, Pettersen reviewed all the evidence and put the work between 328 and 335. His view was later supported by M. Slusser. Cf. H. Nordberg, 'A Reconsideration of the Date of St. Athanasius' *Contra Gentes* and *De Incarnatione*,' *StP* 3 (1961):262-266; C. Kannengiesser, 'La date de l'apologie d'Athanase "Contre les Païens" et "sur l'incarnation,"' *RSR* 58 (1970):383-428; A. Pettersen, 'A Reconsideration of the Date of the *Contra*

dual work, the author writes clearly that his primary intention is to defend the rationality of Christian faith against contemporary pagan challenge.<sup>154</sup> After refuting heathenism and explaining the epistemological bases of Christianity, he urges the readers at the end of *Contra Gentes* to have pious faith in Christ and live in obedience to Him, and reminds them that the fruit of such piety is immortality (ἀθανασία) and the kingdom of heaven (βασιλεία οὐρανῶν). He further warns that those who travel the opposite way and not the path of virtue will incur great shame (αἰσχὺνη μεγάλη) and merciless danger (κίνδυνος ἀσύγγνωστος) on the Day of Judgement (ἐν ἡμέρᾳ κρίσεως).<sup>155</sup> After justifying the necessity of Christ's incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection, Athanasius ends his *De Incarnatione* with a similar exhortation. He asks the readers to walk on the way to God by contemplating Him with a pure soul through virtuous life, and pledges that those who live in this way may escape the fire (τὸ πῦρ) on the Day of Judgement (ἐν ἡμέρᾳ κρίσεως) and receive a place in the kingdom of heaven (ἐν τῇ τῶν οὐρανῶν βασιλείᾳ).<sup>156</sup>

What we have found here so far is that Athanasius' early episcopal works are in general consistent and compatible with his initial calling as the bishop of Alexandria. He made effort to enhance the spiritual progression of believers as well as the conversion of pagans. In contrast with Cyril, although being accused directly by the Melitians, he did not take the chance of issuing circular letters to attack the enemies and defend himself. He seems to have paid some attention to the political combat, but he did not spend large amount of words on it. Both his festal epistles and his classic doctrinal double treatise display his reluctance to respond at length to the arguments and attacks of his enemies. At this early stage, he appears to be more attracted by the religious achievement of the church than by the political struggle with the Arians or the Melitians. Concerning Athanasius, A. Pettersen says that he is not just a great churchman involved in the politics of his time, but is also 'a great catechist.'<sup>157</sup> Probably, this observation is correct.

## b) From the restoration of the bishopric in 337 to the start of the third exile in 356

Athanasius finishes his first exile and re-enters Alexandria in November 337. His tenth festal epistle was sent when he was still far away from his flock.<sup>158</sup> This letter

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*Gentes—De Incarnatione* of Athanasius of Alexandria,' *StP* 17 (1982):1030-1040; and M. Slusser, 'Athanasius, *Contra gentes* and *De incarnatione*: Place and Date of Composition,' *JThS* NS 37 (1986):114-117.

<sup>154</sup> *C. Gent.* 1 (Thomson, p.2). As E. P. Meijering says, the purpose of the treatise is 'a refutation of the objections made by the Greeks against the cross of Christ.' Meijering, *Athanasius: Contra Gentes*, p.9.

<sup>155</sup> *C. Gent.* 47 (Thomson, p.132).

<sup>156</sup> *De Incarn.* 57 (Thomson, pp.274-276).

<sup>157</sup> Pettersen, 'A Reconsideration of the Date of the *Contra Gentes—De Incarnatione* of Athanasius of Alexandria,' p.1037.

<sup>158</sup> Athanasius mentions in the letter, 'A great distance (سَمٌّ بَعِيدٌ) has separated us.' *Ep. Fest.* 10.1 (Cureton, p.45).

reflects his ministerial policy towards the tough battle with the Arians and Melitians after his episcopal career was formally disrupted. At the preamble, he first expresses his thanks to the Lord for his comfort in the affliction that the notifications about the times of the annual paschal feasts of the past two years had been successfully sent to his church.<sup>159</sup> He writes sentimentally with the conviction that the Lord can spiritually bring all believers together irrespective of the geographical distance, 'Thus, keeping the feast (✠✠✠) myself, I was desirous that you also, my beloved, should keep it.'<sup>160</sup> Afterwards, he shifts immediately to his present situation and shares his personal reflection about tribulation. It can eventually make a man praise God more freely. Quoting Hezekiah, Hananiah, Mishaël, and Azariah as examples of praising God after trials, he says, 'I too like them have written, my brethren, having these things in mind.'<sup>161</sup> He consoles his congregation that God is good. He will multiply His loving-kindness towards them in the persecution of the enemies. Since He is rich and manifold, He will feed them properly according to the individual capacity of their souls.<sup>162</sup> Then, Athanasius compares at length the saints with the wicked. Citing the life of Job, David, Jacob and Joseph as examples, he points out that this is the characteristic of the ungodly to smite and to injure the godly. The saints on the other hand take such to themselves and look upon them as friends.<sup>163</sup> From the persecution of the Lord by the Jews, he demonstrates that, through many tribulations and labours, the saint enters into the kingdom of heaven. In contrast, the lover of pleasures, rejoicing for a little while, afterwards passes a sorrowful life.<sup>164</sup> From the example of the Israelites and Elisha, he further shows that those who endure temporal afflictions will finally attain comfort, whereas those who persecute have no good end.<sup>165</sup> After such comparisons, he exhorts his flock, 'Oh! My dearly beloved, if we shall gain comfort from afflictions, if rest from labours, if health after sickness, if from death immortality, it is not right to be distressed by the temporal ills that lay hold on mankind...but we should the more please God through these things.'<sup>166</sup> Following this suffering theme, Athanasius' attention focuses at once on that of the Saviour. He discusses again the saving mystery of Christ in His tribulation and the grace people may get through Him.<sup>167</sup> Having evinced the greatness of the Saviour, he turns to refute the

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<sup>159</sup> Athanasius writes here, 'yet the Lord, strengthening and comforting us in our afflictions, we have not feared, even when held fast in the midst of such machinations and conspiracies, to indicate and make known to you our saving Easter-feast, even from the ends of the earth.' *Ep. Fest.* 10.1 (Cureton, pp.45-46).

<sup>160</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 10.1-2 (Cureton, p.46).

<sup>161</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 10.3 (Cureton, pp.46-47).

<sup>162</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 10.4 (Cureton, pp.47-48).

<sup>163</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 10.4 (Burgess, pp.145-144).

<sup>164</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 10.5 (Burgess, p.144; Cureton, p.47).

<sup>165</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 10.6 (Cureton, pp.47-48).

<sup>166</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 10.7 (Cureton, p.48).

<sup>167</sup> Here, Athanasius writes, 'He suffered to prepare freedom from suffering for those who suffer in Him. He descended that He might raise us up. He took on Him the trial of being born that we might love Him



fault of the enemies. He says, ‘Because they did not thus consider these matters, the Arianians, being opponents of Christ and heretics, smite Him who is their Helper with their tongue, blaspheme Him who set them free, and hold all manner of different opinions against the Saviour.’ Having listed the false doctrines of the enemies, he sighed, ‘If you had considered what the Father and what the Son is, you would not have blasphemed the Son as of a mutable nature.’<sup>168</sup> After all these discussions, he moves to practical application and asks, ‘What then is our duty, my brethren, for the sake of these things?’ Surprisingly, after a series of trials and afflictions, Athanasius does not politically call his supporters to do anything on the battle. He just urges them to praise the Lord and keep the paschal feast, in conversation, moral conduct and manner of life.<sup>169</sup>

Compared with the previous festal epistles, particularly the first one, this tenth letter shows several distinctive features. Firstly, while still being a single unity, this epistle is less systematic and less organised. Substituting many logical arguments is sentimental sharing of the meditation from personal experience. Joyful tone is replaced by thoughtful consolation. To the practical needs of his flock, the message of this letter is more down-to-earth. Secondly, while the incarnate Christ and His salvation are still at the centre of theological reflection, the significance of suffering is analysed deeply. The encouraging themes like the loving-kindness of God and the contrary ends of the godly and ungodly are stressed. Thirdly, the content is still consistent with his general spiritual teachings. However, the emphasis of spontaneous ascetic discipline is superseded by continuous endurance of suffering. Finally, the author refers to the heretics more. Political functions are embraced in spiritual teachings. Breaking through the silence in the previous letters, he disproves the view of the enemies directly. By identifying the persecutors as opponents of Christ, he integrates the earthly battle into his spiritual and theological system. However, instead of polemic, the anti-heretical messages are primarily prophetic in nature. Far from calling the audiences to fight violently, he urges them to endure afflictions and to imitate the saints who look upon the persecutors as friends. From the context of the anti-Arian passage of this letter we can see that the central focus of the bishop remains on the suffering Saviour. This epistle, as C. Kannengiesser describes, reveals the author’s most deeply religious reaction after his enforced stay in western Europe. Still in his late thirties, Athanasius speaks to his people the language of a leader, matured and made resolute by his experiences. The freedom of speech is not used as an occasion for loud utterances of protest against his ecclesiastical

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who is unbegotten. He went down to corruption that corruption might put on immortality. He became weak for us that we might rise with power. He descended to death that He might bestow on us immortality and give life to the dead. Finally, He became man that we who die as men might live again and that death should no more reign over us.’ *Ep. Fest.* 10.8 (Cureton, p.49).

<sup>168</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 10.9 (Cureton, pp.49-50).

<sup>169</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 10.11 (Cureton, p.51).

adversaries. Rather, he eagerly shares with all those under his pastoral responsibility the lesson of his recent exile. He infuses the opportunity of such an intimate report with a pedagogical intent of his own in showing how scripture is capable of helping Christians to reach a more essential self-understanding through the many hazards of their lives.<sup>170</sup> After two years of exile, although having formally taken up the earthly battle against the enemies, Athanasius seems to have still put shepherding his flock at the first place of his episcopal career.

After Constantine died, his three sons were proclaimed Augusti in September 337, with the pro-Eusebian Constantius acquiring the eastern part of the empire. From then on, the attack against Athanasius continued without a break. The Syriac festal index tells us that there were many tumults in the year between Easter in 338 and 339. On 18 March 339, Athanasius was sought after by his persecutors in the night. Four days later, Gregory the Cappadocian entered Alexandria as bishop.<sup>171</sup> The eleventh paschal letter was very probably written in the period between the first start of persecution and the formal usurpation of Gregory. Again, the bishop focuses his attention on the biblical teachings about Christian virtues such as faith and godliness, and doctrinal concepts such as Christ and His feast.<sup>172</sup> At the end of the letter, Athanasius on the one hand urges his congregation to count as nothing the affliction the party of Eusebius instigated against them, and on the other hand redirects their minds to spiritual reality.<sup>173</sup> Instead of assaulting the enemies, he exhorts his supporters, 'Let us therefore keep the feast (ܩܕܝܫܐ), my brethren, celebrating it not at all as an occasion of distress (ܕܥܝܢܐ) and mourning (ܕܡܪܬܐ).'<sup>174</sup>

Athanasius left Alexandria and began his second exile shortly after the arrival of Gregory.<sup>175</sup> During the seven years of exile from 339 to 346, the banished bishop could only issue three paschal letters, one of which is wanting. The festal dates of the other four Easters were announced through short notes to the presbyters of Alexandria.<sup>176</sup> Following the suffering theme of the tenth epistle, both the two extant paschal letters of this period reflect Athanasius' personal meditation on the recent distressful situation. While the thirteenth letter is primarily a theological reflection on tribulation, the fourteenth

<sup>170</sup> Kannengiesser, 'The Homiletic Festal Letters of Athanasius,' p.82.

<sup>171</sup> Index to *Ep. Fest.* 11 (SC 317, pp.236-238).

<sup>172</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 11.1-11 (Cureton, pp.52-56; Burgess, pp.143-141; Cureton, pp.ܩܕܝܫܐ-ܕܥܝܢܐ).

<sup>173</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 11.12 (Cureton, pp.ܩܕܝܫܐ-ܕܡܪܬܐ).

<sup>174</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 11.13 (Cureton, p.ܩܕܝܫܐ).

<sup>175</sup> T. D. Barnes is right in saying that the bishop in order to avoid arrest needed to escape from the territory of Constantius with all haste. Cf. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, p.50. The Syriac festal index reports that Gregory continued his persecution in Alexandria throughout the first two years of his stay. Cf. Index to *Ep. Fest.* 12-13 (SC 317, pp.238-240).

<sup>176</sup> Index to *Ep. Fest.* 12-18 (SC 317, pp.238-246).

concentrates mainly on one's practical attitude towards afflictions.<sup>177</sup> The bishop concludes at the end of the thirteenth letter, 'So we, when we are tried by these things, will not separate ourselves from the love of God. But let us now keep the feast, my beloved, not as introducing a day of suffering (ⲥⲱⲧ ⲛⲁⲩⲁ), but of joy in Christ (ⲥⲱⲧⲁ ⲛⲁⲩⲁ), by Whom we are fed every day.'<sup>178</sup> Similarly, he emphasises in the fourteenth paschal message, 'Let us, being followers of such men, pass no season (ⲛⲁⲩⲁ) without thanksgiving, but especially now, when the time is one of tribulation (ⲛⲁⲩⲁⲩⲁ), which the heretics excite against us, will we praise the Lord, uttering the words of the saints (ⲛⲁⲩⲁⲩⲁ ⲛⲁⲩⲁ).'<sup>179</sup> Facing the increasing tyranny of the adversaries, Athanasius continually tries to interpret and solve the problem in a religious manner. He put forwards messages according to his own spirituality and theology. Instead of stirring up anger against the enemies, he asks his supporters to neglect the earthly battle and concentrate only on God.

Athanasius was restored to his diocese and re-entered Alexandria in October 346 through the intervention of the western emperor Constans.<sup>180</sup> In the so-called 'golden decade' of his episcopal career, he sent paschal letters every year to all the churches under his jurisdiction. A few general characteristics may be observed on the existent texts, mostly in fragments, of the nineteenth to twenty-eighth festal epistles. Basically, they are all expositions of biblical theology on three major subjects, namely the mystery of Easter, the salvation of Christ, and the necessary virtues of believers. He tells the congregation the spiritual meanings of the paschal feast and urges them to prepare themselves for it.<sup>181</sup> He explains why the incarnation, crucifixion and ascension of Christ are essential for the salvation and exaltation of believers.<sup>182</sup> He also exhorts his flock to have faith in Christ,<sup>183</sup> pray incessantly,<sup>184</sup> keep the commandments and imitate the behaviour of the saints.<sup>185</sup> Everything is perfectly consistent with Athanasius' own spirituality. In the letters, he sometimes denounces the faithlessness of the heretics and the Jews, who serve in the festal epistles as a type of enemies of the Christian church.<sup>186</sup> This message undeniably has certain political function. Nevertheless, such denunciation remains strictly within the boundary of his general spiritual teachings. He nowhere calls

<sup>177</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 13.1-6, 14.1-5 (Cureton, pp.ⲉ-ⲁ, 26-31). The 14<sup>th</sup> letter is formerly the 3<sup>rd</sup> one. Cf. Appendix E of this thesis.

<sup>178</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 13.7 (Cureton, pp.ⲁ-ⲁ).

<sup>179</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 14.5 (Cureton, p.30).

<sup>180</sup> *Historia Acephala* 1.1 (SC 317, p.138).

<sup>181</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 19.8, 20.1, 24.1 (Cureton, p.ⲁⲥⲁⲩⲁ, 20-21); *Ep. Fest.* 28 (PG 26, col.1433).

<sup>182</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 24.5, 27 (Cureton, p.23, ⲁ); *Ep. Fest.* 22, 28 (PG 26, col.1432-1433, 1433).

<sup>183</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 19.7 (Cureton, p.ⲁⲥ).

<sup>184</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 19.8 (Cureton, p.ⲁⲥ).

<sup>185</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 24.2 (Cureton, p.21).

<sup>186</sup> For his attacks on the Jews and the heretics, see *Ep. Fest.* 19.2-3,6 (Cureton, pp.ⲁⲥⲁⲩⲁ, ⲁⲥ).

his audiences to fight against the Arians or Melitians with human force. In spite of the restart of their attacks after the murder of Constans by Magnentius in 350, Athanasius appears to have still devoted himself to the ministry of expounding the mystery of Christianity. Political conflict with the enemies apparently occupies a rather subordinate position.<sup>187</sup>

In this period, Athanasius composed several works, which may give us some hints about his episcopal focus. After Gregory the Cappadocian entered Alexandria in 339, Athanasius wrote the *Epistula ad Episcopos Encyclica* complaining about the outrages of the Eusebians. This is the first time he dealt directly with his dispute with the adversaries.<sup>188</sup> Later, he composed the three great volumes of *Orationes contra Arianos*, which summarise the Arian doctrine as represented in the *Thalia* and criticise their exegesis of some crucial biblical texts.<sup>189</sup> In the golden decade, Athanasius composed two more doctrinal treatises. *De Decretis Nicaenae Synodi* defends the validity of the Nicene faith against the Arian challenge. It marks the insistence of Athanasius on the term ὁμοούσιος.<sup>190</sup> *De Sententia Dionysii* rejects the Arians' attempt to claim Dionysius of Alexandria as their antecedent.<sup>191</sup> Although the major content of these treatises is

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<sup>187</sup> Historical sources witness that prosecutions and persecutions against Athanasius restarted in 353. Cf. *Historia Acephala* 1.7-8 (SC 317, pp.140-142); and the index to *Ep. Fest.* 25-28 (SC 317, pp.252-256). See also Barnes' reconstruction of the history of this period. Cf. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, chap.XIII.

<sup>188</sup> *Ad Episc.* 1-7 (PG 25, col.221-240). The date of the epistle is generally agreed, varying only by one or two year. Cf. Tetz, 'Athanasius von Alexandrien,' 4:344; Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p.419; Stead, 'Athanasius,' 1:94; and Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, p.xi. See also the discussion of the circumstances surrounding the encyclical letter in Barnard, 'Two Notes on Athanasius,' pp.352-356.

<sup>189</sup> *Or. Ar.* 1-3 (PG 26, col.12-468). Traditionally, the triple treatise was assigned to the period between 356 and 362 when Athanasius was in his third exile. Cf. Robertson, *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius*, pp.303-305; Quasten, *Patrology*, vol.3, pp.26-28. Modern scholars, including E. D. Moutsoulas, M. Tetz, R. P. C. Hanson and G. C. Stead, commonly date it to the period between 338 to 345. Cf. E. D. Moutsoulas, 'Le Problème de la date des "Trois discours" contre les Ariens d'Athanase d'Alexandrie,' *StP* 16 (1985):324-341; Tetz, 'Athanasius von Alexandrien,' 4:344; Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p.419; and Stead, 'Athanasius,' 1:94. C. Kannengiesser's rejection of the authenticity of the third oration gains no support from other modern scholars and was questioned by G. C. Stead in a book review. Cf. Kannengiesser, 'Athanasius of Alexandria—Three Orations against the Arians: A Reappraisal,' pp.981-995; G. C. Stead, Review of Kannengiesser, *Athanase d'Alexandrie évêque et écrivain*, *JThS* NS 36 (1985):220-229.

<sup>190</sup> *De Decretis* 1-32 (PG 25, col.416-476). Most scholars, including C. Kannengiesser, M. Tetz, T. D. Barnes and G. C. Stead, put *De Decretis* to the early 350s. R. P. C. Hanson's dating this work to 356 seems to be short of support. The necessity of defending the Nicene faith existed long before the formal third exile of Athanasius. Cf. Kannengiesser, 'Athanasius,' 1:139; Tetz, 'Athanasius von Alexandrien,' 4:344; Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, pp.198-199; Stead, 'Athanasius,' 1:94; and Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p.419.

<sup>191</sup> *De Sent. Dion.* 1-27 (PG 25, col.480-521). This work follows directly on *De Decretis*. They both claim that the earlier Alexandrian fathers were in favour of the Nicene faith. Concerning the date of this treatise, see Kannengiesser, 'Athanasius,' 1:139; Tetz, 'Athanasius von Alexandrien,' 4:344; and Stead, 'Athanasius,' 1:94.



theological, one must admit that they have important political functions. Athanasius sometimes criticises the Arians severely. Here, we see that the bishop has now started to put greater effort on political struggle. He has wisely and carefully embraced his political ideas in doctrinal discussions. In addition to these works, Athanasius also wrote several spiritual treatises for the virgins and the monks in this period. The Coptic *Epistula ad Virgines* compares marriage with virginity. The author urges the recipients to follow the virginal model of Mary and warns them against the extreme view of Hieracas.<sup>192</sup> The Coptic *Fragmenta* encourages the addressees, both ascetics and laymen, to live a virtuous life and follow the perseverance of the martyrs.<sup>193</sup> The *Epistula ad Amun* exhorts Amun to guide the monks under him and rectifies their erroneous views on natural excretion and marriage.<sup>194</sup> The *Epistula ad Dracontium* persuades the abbot Dracontius, who was elected as bishop of Hermopolis, to resume his episcopal office for the sake of the religious advantages of the people in his see.<sup>195</sup> Everything points to the fact that Athanasius is still interested in and devoted to his theology and spirituality in spite of the ecclesiastical engagement with the Arians and Melitians. Even when he openly criticises the enemies, his condemnation is according to his general spiritual teachings. He dedicated himself to the ministry of the church, which was for him a supreme vocation from God. Of course, in front of the seemingly unavoidable battle, he had put certain amount of attention and effort on it. He had not only done it carefully, but also wisely. It is this side of Athanasius that modern historians often emphasise.

### c) From hiding amongst the Egyptian monks in 356 to the death of Athanasius in 373

In August 355, Diogenes the Imperial Notary went to Alexandria and intended to compel Athanasius to leave by force. After besieging the church for four months, he returned without success.<sup>196</sup> On 6 January 356, a few days after Diogenes left, Duke Syrianus and Hilary the Notary entered Alexandria with numerous soldiers in order to capture Athanasius. They rushed with violence into the Church of Theonas on the

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<sup>192</sup> Comparison of marriage and virginity (*Ad Virgin. Cop.* 1-8, 18-21: CSCO 150, pp.73-76, 80-83); the model of Mary (*Ad Virgin. Cop.* 9-17: CSCO 150, pp.76-80); and the warning against Hieracas (*Ad Virgin. Cop.* 22-30: CSCO 150, pp.83-88). D. Brakke places this work in the period from 337 to 339. Cf. Brakke, 'The Authenticity of the Ascetic Athanasiana,' pp.24-25.

<sup>193</sup> The life of virtue (*Fra. Cop.* 2-8: CSCO 150, pp.121-126); the exemplar of the martyrs (*Fra. Cop.* 11-12: CSCO 150, pp.128-129). The similarities of the treatise to *Ad Virgin. Cop.* tend to date it to the early years of Athanasius' career. Cf. Brakke, 'The Authenticity of the Ascetic Athanasiana,' p.34.

<sup>194</sup> *Ad Amun* (PG 26, col.1169-1176). L. W. Barnard judges the letter to be written in the early 350s. Cf. Barnard, 'The Letters of Athanasius to Amoun and Dracontius,' p.354.

<sup>195</sup> *Ad Drac.* 1-10 (PG 25, col.524-533). From the time when Dracontius became the bishop of the see, the letter can be precisely dated to 354. Cf. Tetz, 'Athanasius von Alexandrien,' 4:344; and Barnard, 'The Letters of Athanasius to Amoun and Dracontius,' p.357.

<sup>196</sup> *Historia Acephala* 1.9 (SC 317, p.142).

evening of 8 February, but the bishop escaped.<sup>197</sup> Four days after the prefect Cataphronius and Count Heraclius arrived at Alexandria on 10 June 356, all the Athanasians were ejected from the churches and the church properties were handed over to the party of George. On 24 February 357, George entered Alexandria and sought for Athanasius in the city with serious oppression against his supporters.<sup>198</sup> Written about one year in advance for the 357 Easter, the twenty-ninth paschal letter discusses once more the theological meanings of tribulation. After facing a new series of instances of violent coercion, Athanasius still insists on directing the minds of his congregation onto God. He reminds them that trials are tests and training for the saints and encourages them to endure the afflictions like the patriarchs. God's permitting tribulation does not indicate hatred or forgetfulness on his part, but indicates the love and care of God. It can eventually help Christians to suppress human nature, and thus is beneficial for their spiritual advancement.<sup>199</sup>

Being in his third exile, Athanasius was not able to send any festal epistle in the following four years. Historical sources report that there were several riots in this period. Numberless Alexandrians attacked George in the Church of Dionysius on 29 August 358 and ejected him from the city thirty-four days afterwards. The supporters of Athanasius occupied the churches for two and a half months until Duke Sebastian cast them out and assigned the properties back to the Georgians.<sup>200</sup> On 23 June 359, Paulus the Notary published in Alexandria an imperial order on behalf of George and coerced many people to support him. George himself then came back to the city on 26 November 361.<sup>201</sup> Just four days after his arrival, the prefect Gerontius announced the death of Constantius. Multitudes of Alexandrians immediately shouted against George and placed him under custody. On 24 December, a mob dragged him out of prison and lynched him.<sup>202</sup> The emperor Julian judged that he had been murdered by pagans.<sup>203</sup> Regarding Athanasius as a violent gangster, T. D. Barnes argues that the ecclesiastical opponents of George, of course including the exiled bishop, had a high possibility of being involved in the lynching.<sup>204</sup> However, it should be noted that Athanasius had invariably urged his supporters in the festal epistles to endure afflictions and focus only on God. Instead of stirring up anger, he calmed the moods of his adherents down. This attitude is clearly

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<sup>197</sup> *Historia Acephala* 1.10-11 (SC 317, pp.142-144); index to *Ep. Fest.* 28 (SC 317, p.256).

<sup>198</sup> *Historia Acephala* 2.2-3 (SC 317, pp.144-146); index to *Ep. Fest.* 29 (SC 317, pp.256-258).

<sup>199</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 29 (CSCO 150, pp.51-56).

<sup>200</sup> *Historia Acephala* 2.3-4 (SC 317, p.146); index to *Ep. Fest.* 30 (SC 317, p.258).

<sup>201</sup> *Historia Acephala* 2.5-6 (SC 317, p.146).

<sup>202</sup> *Historia Acephala* 2.8-10 (SC 317, p.148).

<sup>203</sup> Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 3.3 (PG 67, col.384-388).

<sup>204</sup> Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, p.155.

maintained in the last paschal letter before his third exile. Even if there were really some of his supporters participating in the murder, it is evidently something he did not suggest.

On 8 February 362, Julian issued an edict ordering all exiled bishops to return to their sees. Thirteen days later Athanasius reappeared in Alexandria.<sup>205</sup> Shortly after that, he composed his thirty-fifth paschal letter. On 24 October, Julian published another edict commanding him to retire. Athanasius immediately left the city and went up to the Thebais. He stayed there for eight months until he learned that Julian had died on 26 June 363. He then returned to Alexandria and ended his fourth exile about August.<sup>206</sup> If the extant Coptic fragments are authentic, we may see that, in the thirty-sixth letter for the 364 Easter, Athanasius reminds his congregation of the content of the orthodox doctrine by reiterating the Nicene faith.<sup>207</sup> He prompts the addressees at the end of the epistle not to react against the enemies in order to avoid further conflicts. He says, 'I am begging you, should they publish written statements, do not laugh (CΩBE) at anybody, nor laugh at those who spoke against us in the past. For such blame does not come out of you, nor out of any human agency, but only from God (ΕΒΟΛΗ ΖΗΤΗΜΗΝΟΥΤΕ).'<sup>208</sup>

From then on, the ageing Athanasius was apparently able to send a paschal letter every year, including the period between 365 and 366 Easter when he was banished the fifth time. A general observation on these epistles, mostly preserved in fragments, may be made here. Firstly, as in earlier letters, the major arguments of Athanasius are mainly doctrinal. The mystery of Christ remains at the centre of his teachings. For the old bishop, the Lord is the true teacher revealing the divine mystery to men.<sup>209</sup> He opens for human beings an accessible way to heaven through His blood so that they may inherit the kingdom of God.<sup>210</sup> He is the true Λόγος of God who vouchsafes life and gives the Holy Spirit.<sup>211</sup> In the epistles, he seldom mentions his enemies. Secondly, the main concern of Athanasius remains the spiritual advancement of his flock. He tried every effort to shepherd them. He informed them of true orthodox doctrine,<sup>212</sup> advised them concerning right procedures for church ministry,<sup>213</sup> and exhorted them to walk on the way to God and

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<sup>205</sup> *Historia Acephala* 3.2-4 (SC 317, p.150); index to *Ep. Fest.* 34 (SC 317, pp.262-264).

<sup>206</sup> *Historia Acephala* 3.5-4.4 (SC 317, pp.150-154); index to *Ep. Fest.* 35 (SC 317, p.264).

<sup>207</sup> The authenticity of the two extant Coptic fragments for *Ep. Fest.* 36 was rejected by A. Camplani, but was accepted without doubt by R. Lorenz. Cf. Camplani, *Le Lettere festali di Atanasio di Alessandria*, p.40, 101-105; Lorenz, *Der zehnte Osterfestbrief des Athanasius von Alexandrien*, p.15, 31.

<sup>208</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 36 (CSCO 150, p.70).

<sup>209</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 39 (CSCO 150, pp.58-59).

<sup>210</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 43 (PG 26, col.1440-1441).

<sup>211</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 44 (Cureton, p.١٤).

<sup>212</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 39, 43 (CSCO 150, p.21, 31-36); *Ep. Fest.* 44 (Cureton, p.١٤).

<sup>213</sup> E.g. Election of clergy (*Ep. Fest.* 40: CSCO 150, pp.22-23); patrimonies (*Ep. Fest.* 41: CSCO 150, pp.62-64); and cultic practices at the tombs of the martyrs (*Ep. Fest.* 42: CSCO 150, pp.65-66).

keep the sacred festal feasts.<sup>214</sup> Since the Scriptures are transmitted from the eyewitnesses and assistants of Jesus and in them alone is the teaching of piety proclaimed, the bishop specially gives a complete list of the biblical canon for his flock.<sup>215</sup> All these teachings are consistent with his spirituality we have explored in the previous chapters. Finally, the tone of the letters is constantly pastoral and intimate. Athanasius always addresses the recipients kindly as ‘my brethren’ (إخوتنا) or ‘my beloved’ (محبتنا), and uses ‘we’ and ‘let us’ throughout his festal messages. He never detaches himself from his congregation. This passion reveals itself most clearly in his thirty-eighth epistle when he was seemingly in his fifth exile.<sup>216</sup>

Athanasius’ lifelong pastoral effort in sending festal epistles may best be summarised by restating the serious message in his last paschal letter written only a few months before his death. Here, the ageing bishop gave his final testament, ‘Let us all take up our sacrifices (θυσίας), observing distribution to the poor, and enter into the holy place (τὰ ἅγια), as it is written, “whither also our forerunner Jesus is entered for us, having obtained eternal redemption.”...And this is a great proof that, whereas we were strangers (ξένους), we are called friends (οἰκείους); from being formerly aliens (ἀλλοτρίους), we are become fellow-citizens with the saints (συμπολίτας τῶν ἁγίων), and are called children (τέκνα) of the Jerusalem which is above, whereof that which Solomon built was a type (τύπος). For if Moses made all things according to the pattern shown him in the mount, it is clear that the service performed in the tabernacle was a type (τύπος) of the heavenly mysteries, whereto the Lord, desirous that we should enter, prepared for us the new and abiding way (τὴν ὁδὸν πρόσφατον καὶ μένουσαν). And as all the old things were a type of the new, so the festival that now is, is a type of the joy which is above (τύπος τῆς ἄνω χαρᾶς), to which coming with psalms and spiritual songs, let us begin the fasts (τῶν νηστειῶν).’<sup>217</sup> Invariably resting his thanks and arguments on the biblical teachings about the saving mysteries of Christ, he directs the minds of his flock to God and the eternal heavenly joy till the end of his life.<sup>218</sup>

<sup>214</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 41, 42, 43 (PG 26, col.1440, 1440, 1440-1441). The Greek fragment of *Ep. Fest.* 41 was formerly falsely treated as *Ep. Fest.* 40. Cf. Lorenz, *Der zehnte Osterfestbrief des Athanasius von Alexandrien*, p.15.

<sup>215</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 39 (PG 26, col.1436-1437).

<sup>216</sup> Here, Athanasius exclaims, ‘I, too, I really like such an assembly, and I would almost start praying, “Who shall give me the wings like the doves (ΠΤΕΝΤΕΣ ΝΟΕ ΝΗΕΙΣΡΟΜΠΕ) to fly away and find rest with you?” But another thought cheers me up, “There must be another way of overcoming the separation between us when we stay under our different tents.”’ *Ep. Fest.* 38 (CSCO 150, p.57).

<sup>217</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 45 (PG 26, col.1441-1444).

<sup>218</sup> After examining the festal theology of Athanasius, Badger also concludes that, for the most part, ‘Athanasius gives traditional pastoral counsel and paraenesis in his festal epistles.’ His whole approach to the feast is concentrated on ‘the general course of the believer’s *anodos*—the “journey of the soul.”’ Beyond this appropriation of tradition, ‘Athanasius interpenetrates his own Christological vision into his



The majority of Athanasius' works were composed in this period. When hiding amongst the monks in the third exile, he composed several important apologetic treatises. The *Epistula ad Episcopos Aegypti et Libyae* protests against the plot and doctrine of the Arians.<sup>219</sup> The *Apologia ad Imperatorem Constantium* tried to dismiss before the emperor some serious charges that his enemies raised against him.<sup>220</sup> The *Apologia de Fuga Sua* explains the reasons for his flight.<sup>221</sup> The *Apologia contra Arianos* defends his case against the Arian accusations by providing numerous supporting documents for the period between 331 and 347.<sup>222</sup> Apparently, all these apologetic works were published after his ministry was seriously disrupted when self-defence had become totally unavoidable. In addition to the four above, Athanasius also composed the *Historia Arianorum* summarising the attacks of the Arians to the orthodox over the period from 335 to 358.<sup>223</sup> According to its covering letter preserved as *Epistula ad Monachos II*, this historical report was made on the frequent requests of the monks and was intended for private reference only.<sup>224</sup> On a similar request from Serapion of Thmuis, Athanasius wrote

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paschal missives.' Badger, 'The New Man Created in God: Christology, Congregation and Asceticism in Athanasius of Alexandria,' p.153, 156.

<sup>219</sup> *Ad Aeg. Lib.* 1-23 (PG 25, col.537-593). This circular letter is commonly dated to 356. It was written when Athanasius knew that George was nominated to the Alexandrian see. The lack of detailed accounts of the persecutions against the orthodox suggests the epistle to be composed before the arrival of George. Cf. Kannengiesser, 'Athanasius,' 1:139; Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p.420; Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, p.xii; and Stead, 'Athanasius,' 1:94. M. Tetz places the letter in 361. His view is not common among scholars. Cf. Tetz, 'Athanasius von Alexandrien,' 4:344.

<sup>220</sup> *Apol. Const.* 1-35 (PG 25, col.596-641). The charges include poisoning the mind of Constans, communicating with Magnentius, using the new church in the Caesareum before dedication, and disobeying the imperial order to leave Alexandria. Although some scholars, such as J. M. Szymusiak, propose that the first half of the treatise was written in the period between 353 to 355, the final composition of the work is unanimously accepted to be in 356-357. Cf. J. M. Szymusiak, ed. and tr., *Apologie à l'Empereur Constance et Apologie pour sa fuite*, SC 56 (Paris, 1958), p.30, 55, 59-63. See also the dating in Kannengiesser, 'Athanasius,' 1:139; Tetz, 'Athanasius von Alexandrien,' 4:344; Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p.419; and Stead, 'Athanasius,' 1:94.

<sup>221</sup> *Apol. Fuga* 1-27 (PG 25, col.644-680). Nearly all scholars, whether early or modern, put this work to 356-357 without dissent. Cf. Kannengiesser, 'Athanasius,' 1:139; Tetz, 'Athanasius von Alexandrien,' 4:344; Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p.420; Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, p.xii; and Stead, 'Athanasius,' 1:94.

<sup>222</sup> *Apol. Ar.* 1-90 (PG 25, col.248-409). Different proposals have been suggested about the date of the treatise. Today, most scholars believe that the supporting documents were gathered in the 340s and were privately circulated among the supporters of Athanasius. The final complete work was composed about 357/8. For a discussion of the date and audience of the treatise, see L. W. Barnard, *Studies in Athanasius' Apologia Secunda* (Berne, 1992), pp.15-19.

<sup>223</sup> *Hist. Ar.* 1-81 (PG 25, col.696-796). Since Athanasius denounces Constantius in the treatise, it must be written after the composition of the previous four apologetic works. The majority of scholars date it to 357-358. Cf. Tetz, 'Athanasius von Alexandrien,' 4:344; Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p.420; Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, p.xii; and Stead, 'Athanasius,' 1:94. Not accepting its offensive attitude against Constantius, Kannengiesser suggests that this treatise is 'pseudo-Athanasian.' Cf. Kannengiesser, 'St. Athanasius of Alexandria Rediscovered: His Political and Pastoral Achievement,' p.74. However, his view is not common amongst scholars.

<sup>224</sup> *Ad Mon. II* 1, 3 (PG 25, col.692-693). The main problem of dating the letter is whether the 'short account' in the letter is referring to the *Or. Ar.* or the *Hist. Ar.*. Since the former is too long to be called

the *Epistula ad Serapionem de Morte Arii* giving a short account about the death of Arius.<sup>225</sup> Seemingly, Athanasius is quite reluctant in writing about his political conflicts with the opponents. He defends himself or denounces the adversaries only when it is absolutely necessary or when it is repeatedly requested by others. Nonetheless, such image must be balanced by the fact that Athanasius is quite perspicacious in presenting his political ideas. Both the use of tones and the arrangement of materials show that he has composed the treatises carefully and strategically. At this late stage, he had evidently used more effort on the contemporary political struggle.

Parallel with the exertion of political struggle with the opponents, Athanasius appears to have also promoted and established orthodox doctrine actively and eagerly. He specially wrote at length the *Epistulae ad Serapionem* to defend the full divinity of the Spirit against the pneumatological challenge from the Tropici.<sup>226</sup> Shortly after the twin synods in 359, he published *De Synodis Arimini in Italia et Seleucia in Isauria* with the intention of validating the Nicene faith by appealing to the party of Basil of Ancyra.<sup>227</sup> As soon as Jovian was proclaimed Augustus, he composed the *Epistula ad Imperatorem Iovianum* explaining the orthodox faith for the new emperor.<sup>228</sup> Knowing that the Arians were planning to substitute the creed of Rimini for the Nicene creed, he wrote the *Epistula ad Afros* in the name of ninety Egyptian and Libyan bishops at once to warn other African priests about that.<sup>229</sup> Surely, some of these treatises may have certain political functions, but the key discussions are still doctrinal. Athanasius' enthusiasm in defending the Nicene faith may also be seen in his private letters. In the *Epistula ad Epictetum*, he expounds the relationship between the historical Christ and the eternal

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'short,' most scholars treat *Ad Mon. II* as the covering letter of the latter. That will naturally put the letter to the year 358. Cf. Barnard, *The Monastic Letters of Saint Athanasius the Great*, pp.xiii-xiv.

<sup>225</sup> *Ad Serap. M. Ar.* 1-5 (PG 25, col.685-689). In the letter, Athanasius asks Serapion to read also the brief historical report of Arianism he sent to the monks. This letter is commonly dated to same year as *Ad Mon. II*. See the dating in Tetz, 'Athanasius von Alexandrien,' 4:344; and Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p.419.

<sup>226</sup> *Ad Serap.* 1-4 (PG 26, col.529-676). The quadripartite treatise is generally agreed to be written in the period between 357 and 360. A more definite and precise dating seems to be impossible. For a discussion of the date of the treatise, see C. R. B. Shapland, ed., *The Letter of Saint Athanasius Concerning the Holy Spirit* (London, 1951), pp.16-18.

<sup>227</sup> *De Syn.* 1-55 (PG 26, col.681-793). The treatise was first composed in 359 and later revised in 361. For a discussion of its date, see Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, pp.420-421.

<sup>228</sup> *Ad Iov.* 1-4 (PG 26, col.813-824). The Athanasian authorship of this letter has been questioned by a few scholars. However, most modern publications, including the authoritative *CPG*, treat it as authentic. Since Jovian died on 17 February 364, the letter is unanimously received as written in 363. Cf. Tetz, 'Athanasius von Alexandrien,' 4:344; Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p.420.

<sup>229</sup> *Ad Afr.* 1-11 (PG 26, col.1029-1048). Again, the letter is popularly dated to 369-370 without many objections. Cf. Tetz, 'Athanasius von Alexandrien,' 4:344; Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p.420; and Stead, 'Athanasius,' 1:94. Kannengiesser has argued that this work is not authentic. However, his arguments are based largely on an unsettled hypothesis that the *Or. Ar.* 3 is spurious and the validity of his conclusion is questionable. Cf. Kannengiesser, '(Ps.-) Athanasius, Ad Afros Examined,' pp.264-280.

Son.<sup>230</sup> He justifies the orthodox Christology against the Arian charge of worshipping a creature in the *Epistula ad Adelphium*.<sup>231</sup> Knowing that the philosopher Maximus had written a letter powerfully refuting the heretical view of Adoptionism, he sent the *Epistula ad Maximum* to express his support.<sup>232</sup> As true theology is for Athanasius vital for salvation, he advocates the Nicene faith firmly. However, it appears that, although he is steadfast in doctrinal correctness, he is peaceable in ecclesiastical administration. Dealing with the conflicts between the Eustathians and Melitians in Antioch, he composed the *Tomus ad Antiochenos* in the name of the 362 Synod of Alexandria to re-establish peace and concord.<sup>233</sup> Being asked about the procedure for treating repentant Arians, he invariably refers to the decisions of ecclesiastical synods and recommends pardoning.<sup>234</sup>

In addition to apologetic and doctrinal works, Athanasius also wrote many ascetic treatises in this last period of his episcopacy. In the usurpation of George in 356, many virgins were tortured to death and their bodies were flung away unburied. Under such circumstances, the bishop sent a letter *Epistula Exhortatoria ad Virgines* to the remaining virgins and consoled them, 'Let none of you be grieved' (μηδὲ γενέσθω τις ὑμῶν περίλυπος).<sup>235</sup> When he was still in his third exile, he composed his famous *Vita Antonii*. The purpose of this historical narration is primarily to encourage and guide Christians to walk on the way to God and to stimulate pagans to convert.<sup>236</sup> In the *Epistula ad*

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<sup>230</sup> *Ad Epic.* 1-12 (PG 26, col.1049-1069).

<sup>231</sup> *Ad Adelph.* 1-8 (PG 26, col.1072-1084).

<sup>232</sup> *Ad Max.* 1-5 (PG 26, col.1085-1089). When evaluating the authorship of the *Or. Ar.* 3, Kannengiesser points out that this third oration has 'unusual points-of-contact' with *Ad Afr.* and *Ad Max.*. Cf. Kannengiesser, 'Athanasius of Alexandria—Three Orations against the Arians: A Reappraisal,' p.994. His rejection of the authenticity of the oration would inevitably force him to reject that of the two epistles as well. As *Ad Afr.*, Kannengiesser argues that *Ad Max.* is not Athanasian. However, his arguments are based largely on the same unsettled hypothesis that the *Or. Ar.* 3 is spurious and his judgement is questionable. Cf. Kannengiesser, 'L'énigme de la lettre au philosophe Maxime d'Athanase d'Alexandrie,' pp.261-276. All the above three private letters were apparently written at a late period in Athanasius' episcopacy, probably between 370 and 372. Cf. Tetz, 'Athanasius von Alexandrien,' 4:344; and Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p.420.

<sup>233</sup> *Tom. Ant.* 1-11 (PG 26, col.796-809). The synodal letter is unanimously dated to 362. Cf. Kannengiesser, 'Athanasius,' 1:139; Tetz, 'Athanasius von Alexandrien,' 4:344; Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p.420; and Stead, 'Athanasius,' 1:94. For the historical context of the letter, see A. Pettersen, 'The Arian Context of Athanasius of Alexandria's *Tomus ad Antiochenos* VII,' *JEH* 41 (1990):183-198.

<sup>234</sup> *Ad Ruf.* (PG 26, col.1180-1181). Athanasius cited in the letter decisions made in the Synod of Alexandria. It is commonly dated to 362, or soon after it. Cf. Quasten, *Patrology*, vol.3, p.63; and Tetz, 'Athanasius von Alexandrien,' 4:344.

<sup>235</sup> *Exh. Virgin.*. The excerpt was quoted by Theodoret in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*. The description of affliction matches closely with the events that occurred in 356. Cf. Theodoret, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.11 (PG 82, col.1028).

<sup>236</sup> For the purposes of the hagiography, see Chapter Three part B of this thesis. L. W. Barnard suggests that it must have been written late in 357 or early in 358, but B. R. Brennan argues that it may have been

*Monachos I*, he reminds the monks to preserve a pure and sincere faith, and shun the heretics.<sup>237</sup> By quoting the sayings of his predecessor Alexander, he asks the virgins to keep a suitable degree of ascetic practices in the Arabic *Epistula ad Virgines*.<sup>238</sup> Since most spiritual works do not mention historical events, many of them are difficult to date. Amongst them, the *Epistula ad Marcellinum* praises and introduces the devotional use of the Psalms.<sup>239</sup> E. Ferguson suggests that the goal of the whole letter is 'the spiritual improvement of the reader.'<sup>240</sup> Parallel with it, the *Expositiones in Psalmos* demonstrates how Athanasius interpreted the Psalter allegorically and typologically.<sup>241</sup> The Syriac *Epistula ad Virgines* consoles the virgins who have returned from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and reminds them both of the dangers of the public baths and of spiritual marriage.<sup>242</sup> In the *Sermo de Virginitate*, the author commends virginity and exhorts the recipients to live an ascetic and virtuous life.<sup>243</sup> Being addressed to a person with sickness, *De Morbo et Valetudine* explains the relationship between the health of soul and that of body.<sup>244</sup> In *De Caritate et Temperantia*, the bishop urges the ascetics to be humble and love each other.<sup>245</sup> It can be argued that some of these treatises may have political functions. Nevertheless, their major concerns are incontestably pastoral and spiritual. As in the case of the festal epistles, Athanasius promotes his ascetic ideal in

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written any time around late 358. Cf. L. W. Barnard, 'The Date of S. Athanasius' *Vita Antonii*,' *VC* 28 (1974):169-175; and B. R. Brennan, 'Dating Athanasius' *Vita Antonii*,' *VC* 30 (1976):52-54.

<sup>237</sup> *Ad Mon. I* (PG 26, col.1185-1188). The letter was written in Athanasius' third exile in 356-362. Cf. Barnard, *The Monastic Letters of Saint Athanasius the Great*, pp.xiv-xv.

<sup>238</sup> *Ad Virgin. Ara.* (PO 1, pp.404-405). The excerpt was quoted by Sawîrus in his Arabic *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria*. He mentions that Athanasius sent this letter from his third exile to certain virgins in the city.

<sup>239</sup> *Ad Mar.* 1-33 (PG 27, col.12-45). For analysis of this work, see E. Ferguson, 'Athanasius, *Epistola ad Marcellinum in interpretationem psalmorum*,' *Ἐκκλησιαστικὸς φάρος* 60 (1978):378-403; E. Ferguson, 'Athanasius' *Epistola ad Marcellinum in interpretationem psalmorum*,' *StP* 16 (1985):295-308; C. Kannengiesser, ed., *Early Christian Spirituality*, tr. P. Bright (Philadelphia, 1986), pp.10-20; and Gregg, *Athanasius: The Life of Antony and the Letter of Marcellinus*, pp.21-26. Both Kannengiesser and Gregg have not dated the letter. Only Ferguson has tried to date it to 'a date either after the third exile (361) or after the death of Julian (363).'

<sup>240</sup> Ferguson, 'Athanasius' *Epistola ad Marcellinum in interpretationem psalmorum*,' p.308.

<sup>241</sup> *Exp. Pss* 1-146 (PG 27, col.60-545). For various discussions of its authenticity, see M. J. Rondeau, *Les commentaires patristiques du Psautier I*, OCA 219 (Roma, 1982), pp.79-87; G. C. Stead, 'St. Athanasius on Psalms,' *VC* 39 (1985):65-78; and G. M. Vian, 'Il "De psalmorum titulis": l'esegesi di Atanasio tra Eusebio e Cirillo,' *Orpheus* 12 (1991):93-132. It is difficult to say which sections of the treatise are authentic. However, Athanasius has at least composed some of them.

<sup>242</sup> Consolation (*Ad Virgin. Syr.* 1-7: *Mus* 41, pp.170-174); public bath (*Ad Virgin. Syr.* 15-18: *Mus* 41, pp.179-181); and spiritual marriage (*Ad Virgin. Syr.* 20-29: *Mus* 41, pp.181-187). D. Brakke dates it to the last decade of Athanasius' reign. Cf. Brakke, 'The Authenticity of the Ascetic Athanasiana,' p.27.

<sup>243</sup> *Ser. Virgin.* 1-18 (*Mus* 40, pp.209-218). Nothing in the treatise suggests a particular date of Athanasius' career.

<sup>244</sup> *De Mor. Val.* 1-8 (OCA 117, pp.5-8). There is no information about its date.

<sup>245</sup> *De Car. Tem.* (CSCO 150, pp.110-120). Again, there is no way to date it precisely. For a discussion of the dating problem of the above three treatises, see Brakke, 'The Authenticity of the Ascetic Athanasiana,' p.30, 32, 36.



these spiritual treatises. Responding to the heavenly vocation, he put great effort to encourage and guide people to walk on the way to God.

So far, we have reviewed nearly all the existent literature of Athanasius, especially his festal epistles. From these works, we see that the Alexandrian bishop was highly interested in religious devotion. Indisputably, he had put great effort in political struggle. However, it seems that such earthly battle only became important at a relatively late stage. Even at the time when he was severely persecuted, spiritual guidance still occupied a considerable part in his mind. After examining the paschal letters of Athanasius, C. Kannengiesser alleges that the real task of the bishop was not just exhorting the communities to prepare for the paschal fast by giving them doctrinal and ascetic advice. He was more willing to have them constantly focused on the central mystery of their religious identity and interpreted their own experience in the light of the incarnate God.<sup>246</sup> From our study above, we find that this intention is not only present in the festal epistles, but also steadily in the whole of his episcopal career. Athanasius saw religion as vital for one's own life and eternal destiny. He valued spiritual achievement higher than worldly pleasure. For this reason, he uncompromisingly defended the orthodox doctrine and was devoted to what he believed to be the vocation of God. Like many early church fathers, Athanasius seems to have acted and lived faithfully according to his religious belief. He applied his theology and spirituality conscientiously in his episcopal and literary career.

## 2. Ascetic and Monastic Career

Since Athanasius was elected as a bishop, a heavy burden was imposed on him. His predecessor, Alexander, died without having reconciled the schismatic Melitians, nor remedied the ecclesiastical instability caused by the excommunication of Arius. However, in spite of these exigent tasks, Athanasius still made his first official journeys after his election to the ascetics. According to the Syriac festal index written just after his death in 373, we know that the new bishop went through the Thebaid in 329/330, only one year after his consecration. Presumably, this pastoral visitation also included the desert on both sides of the Nile Valley, where monks were living.<sup>247</sup> Athanasius could not repeat the trip the following year because, as shown in the index, he was summoned to the imperial court by the emperor Constantine on account of an accusation his enemies made against him.<sup>248</sup> However, the next year in 331/332, he visited the Pentapolis and sojourned in the Oasis of Ammon.<sup>249</sup> A. Martin points out that these areas at that time

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<sup>246</sup> Kannengiesser, 'The Homiletic Festal Letters of Athanasius,' pp.96-97.

<sup>247</sup> Index to *Ep. Fest.* 2 (SC 317, p.228).

<sup>248</sup> Index to *Ep. Fest.* 3 (SC 317, p.228).

<sup>249</sup> Index to *Ep. Fest.* 4 (SC 317, p.230).

covered evenly important cities of the province.<sup>250</sup> On the other hand, as C. Kannengiesser says, these areas also contained many 'monastic groups and hermits.'<sup>251</sup> Apparently, Athanasius suffered 'grievous sickness' (ⲕⲓⲛⲁⲓⲥ) in the long journeys, which made him unable to send the 332 paschal letter on the accustomed time.<sup>252</sup> However, in 333/334, he again spent several months in the lower country, which covered chiefly the deserted areas surrounding the delta of the Nile.<sup>253</sup>

Concerning the reason of these laborious journeys in these crucial first years of Athanasius' episcopacy, various suggestions have been made by scholars. W. H. C. Frend propounds that the purpose of the trips was to gain the good will of the dispersed monks so that the influence of the formidable rival Melitian ascetics might be counteracted.<sup>254</sup> L. W. Barnard asserts that the new bishop wanted to bolster his authority in areas where the Melitians were active.<sup>255</sup> D. B. Brakke goes so far as to ignore all these records and declares that the sources for the first half of Athanasius' episcopate provide little evidence of contact between the bishop and the monks of the Egyptian desert.<sup>256</sup> It seems to me that all these proposals are too overwhelmingly controlled by the scholars' own presuppositions, especially their conceptions of the fourth-century controversy. They failed to observe the bishop's personal monastic interest. If Athanasius was so anxious about his episcopal prospects, which was according to history determined mainly by synods of bishops, he should have concentrated his effort on priests, and not on monks. Instead of visiting the desert areas thrice, he should have spent at least one or two of his trips to the districts such as Palestine and Syria where bishops were crowded together. Possibly, political function of these trips exists. However, his internal monastic interest is something we cannot ignore.

Athanasius' first tour to the Thebaid is reported in the *Vita Pachomii*. As the new archbishop sailed through Tabennesis, Pachomius and the brothers came out to welcome him, exulting and singing psalms. Meanwhile, Sarapion, bishop of Tentyra, begged the archbishop to ordain Pachomius as 'father and priest' (πατέρα καὶ πρεσβύτερον) over all monks in his see. The abbot however immediately hid amongst the brethren.<sup>257</sup> In spite of his refusal to be ordained, Athanasius seems to have gained the support of Pachomius at the very beginning of his episcopate. The *Epistula Ammonis* records that the abbot openly

<sup>250</sup> Martin, *Histoire 'acéphale' et index syriaque des lettres festales d'Athanase d'Alexandrie*, pp.282-283 n.14.

<sup>251</sup> Kannengiesser, 'Athanasius of Alexandria and the ascetic movement of his time,' p.484.

<sup>252</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 4.1 (Cureton, p.32).

<sup>253</sup> Index to *Ep. Fest.* 6 (SC 317, p.230).

<sup>254</sup> W. H. C. Frend, *The Early Church: From the beginnings to 461*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Worcester, 1992), p.148.

<sup>255</sup> L. W. Barnard, 'Athanasius and the Pachomians,' *StP* 32 (1997):4.

<sup>256</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, pp.8-9.

<sup>257</sup> *Vita Pachomii—Graeca* 30 (Athanasakis, p.40).

affirmed the enthronement of Athanasius and described him as ‘a pillar and light for the church’ (στύλον καὶ λύχνον τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ).<sup>258</sup> It appears that the new archbishop had spent much of his time to build up a mutual relationship with the monks through regular pastoral visitations in the crucial years of his early episcopacy. Consistent with the ascetic conviction displayed in his theology and spiritual teachings, Athanasius actively involved in the Egyptian monastic movement.

Athanasius was not able to make further journeys to the desert areas in subsequent years since he was being accused by the adversaries. In the urgent trip to Constantinople in 335, he was unexpectedly banished to Gaul by the emperor. Presumably, he first shared his ascetic and monastic vision with the westerners in this initial period. When Athanasius returned from the first exile, he immediately restarted his effort of promoting asceticism to the people in his diocese. He invited Antony to visit Alexandria. In July 338, about half a year after the bishop’s return, the hermit descended from the mountain and entered the city. It appears that, though he remained there for only two days, many people were affected. At the end of the visit, Athanasius escorted him on his way back to the mountain.<sup>259</sup>

Athanasius’ stay in Alexandria lasted not long. Soon after the usurpation of Gregory on 22 March 339, he began his second exile by fleeing to Rome. During this period, he delegated his jurisdictional powers to Serapion of Thumis, who was formerly a famous monastic abbot.<sup>260</sup> Introduced after the eleventh festal epistle, a letter to Serapion is preserved in which the banished archbishop urged his colleague remotely to announce a forty-day paschal fast to the Egyptian churches.<sup>261</sup> When escaping to the West, Athanasius brought with him some monks who could serve as living examples for the monastic way of life. One of these monks was Ammonius. Socrates records that he, on being urged to enter upon the episcopal office, cut off his own right ear (τὸ δεξιὸν οὖς αὐτοῦ ἐξέκοψεν).<sup>262</sup> Another living example was Isidore. He was later mentioned as the first ‘wonderful man’ (ἄνδρος θαυμάσιος) Palladius met when he came to Alexandria on a monastic quest in 388.<sup>263</sup> Even when he was in exile, Athanasius did not forget his vocation from God. He introduced monasticism to the westerners so that their minds might also be directed to the mystery of Christ. Shortly after its publication, the *Vita Antonii* was translated into Latin and became one of the most popular works in the

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<sup>258</sup> *Epistula Ammonis* 13 (Geohring, p.133).

<sup>259</sup> *V. Ant.* 69-71 (SC 400, pp.314-320); index to *Ep. Fest.* 10 (SC 317, p.236).

<sup>260</sup> Cf. *Ad Drac.* 7 (PG 25, col.532).

<sup>261</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 12.1-2 (Cureton, pp.حج-ح).

<sup>262</sup> Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 4.23 (PG 67, col.520-521).

<sup>263</sup> Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* 1 (Butler, 2:15-16).

ancient world. Certainly, Athanasius' promotion of the monastic lifestyle is one of the most important factors for this popularity.

When Athanasius returned from the second exile, the authorities and the people are said to have come out 'a hundred miles' (ἑκατὸν μίλια) to receive him.<sup>264</sup> Meanwhile, certain Pachomian monks including Zacchaeus and Theodore, after visiting Antony, arrived in Alexandria. The *Vita Pachomii* reports that Athanasius received them and treated them with love (πολλὰ ὑπεδέξατο αὐτοὺς ἀγαπῶν αὐτοὺς).<sup>265</sup> In the so-called 'golden decade,' a revival of religious fervour was noticeable at Alexandria, and many people embraced an ascetic or monastic way of life.<sup>266</sup> Concerning this bloom of religion, F. Cayre declares firmly that this movement was encouraged by Athanasius.<sup>267</sup> As demonstrated before, the festal epistles of the Alexandrian bishop are full of ascetic messages. We may reasonably assume that this tendency was maintained in his weekly sermons.<sup>268</sup> Besides, Athanasius also widely ordained monks as priests. In his letter to Dracontius, he pointed out that there were at least seven abbots of monasteries having been appointed bishops.<sup>269</sup> It seems that he continued this type of episcopal appointment throughout his career.<sup>270</sup> He wanted the monastic bishops to bring spiritual food to their flocks.<sup>271</sup> Athanasius' intention of promoting asceticism and monasticism in the Egyptian church is clear. If the monastic movement was, as D. B. Brakke argues, so hazardous to the consolidation of the hierarchical church that Athanasius needed to use a series of political programs to integrate the ascetic monks into the church, why did he encourage such a movement?<sup>272</sup> We must judge that this is mainly due to his own personal religious belief and conviction.

Because of the series of violent oppressions from the party of George, Athanasius was forced to flee in February 356. Part of the time he was hidden in Alexandria and served by a pretty virgin called Eudaemonis. According to the record of Palladius, during the period when she hid the bishop, Eudaemonis washed his feet (περινίπτουσα τοὺς πόδας), looked after his personal affairs (τὰ περιττεύματα διακονοῦσα), and cared for all his bodily needs (τὰς χρείας αὐτῷ πάσας οἰκονομοῦσα). Because of her hiding the bishop,

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<sup>264</sup> Index to *Ep. Fest.* 18 (SC 317, p.246).

<sup>265</sup> *Vita Pachomii—Graeca* 120 (Athanasakis, p.164).

<sup>266</sup> *Hist. Ar.* 25 (PG 25, col.721-724).

<sup>267</sup> Cayre, *Manual of Patrology and History of Theology*, p.340.

<sup>268</sup> See part B.1 of this chapter.

<sup>269</sup> *Ad Drac.* 7 (PG 25, col.532).

<sup>270</sup> For a discussion of Athanasius' episcopal appointments, see Chapter Two part C.2.c of this thesis.

<sup>271</sup> *Ad Drac.* 2 (PG 25, col.525).

<sup>272</sup> Brakke said in the conclusion of his book, 'The commercial and philosophical activities of Alexandrian virgins, the spiritual powers of monks like Paphnutius and Antony, the huge monasteries of the Pachomian federation—all of these things represented challenges to the hierarchical, orthodox, parish-centred church that Athanasius was forming.' Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, pp.266-267.



she was later bitterly tortured when her house was searched by imperial officials.<sup>273</sup> In 360, Athanasius was believed to be hiding amongst the monks of Tabennesis, of whom he was fond (ἀγαπᾷ γὰρ αὐτούς). The duke Artemius went to Faou with military force in search of him. Unable to find the exiled bishop, Artemius requested the monks to pray for him. Seeing an Arian bishop in his company, the abbot Psarpheis and the brethren bravely replied that their father had given them orders not to pray with anyone who shared the heresy of the Arians (μετ' οὐδενὸς εὐξασθαι συναιρομένου Ἀρειανοῖς).<sup>274</sup> These two accounts demonstrate clearly how intimate a relationship Athanasius had with the virgins and the monks. In the time when he was in tribulation, he chose to seek help from them, and these ascetic partners were also willing to suffer for him.

Shortly after returning from the third exile, Athanasius was banished again by the emperor Julian in October 362. In the spring of 363, the archbishop visited the Thebaid once more 'for the purpose of strengthening all the churches in the faith of Christ.'<sup>275</sup> He was at that time mounted on a donkey and accompanied by countless people, including bishops, clerics and monks from various places chanting psalms and canticles. On the way, he was welcomed by Theodore and several Pachomian monks with him in the diocese of Šmoun.<sup>276</sup> After spending a few days in the surrounding cities and encouraging people with scriptural messages, Athanasius went up to the two monasteries, Nouoi and Kahior, founded by Theodore. Being impressed and moved by what he saw, he applauded the abbot and decided to stay there for the 363 paschal feast.<sup>277</sup> While Theodore was going to return to Faou for Easter, Athanasius gave him a letter for Orsisius, which demonstrated his commendation and care for the monks.<sup>278</sup> As L. W. Barnard observes, this narration recorded in the Bohairic *Vita Pachomii* 200-204 is remarkable for the tenderness and concern shown by Athanasius for the Pachomian monks. There was a mutuality of interest between them and the archbishop was at home during his visits to the Thebaid.<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* 63 (Butler, 2:158-159); index to *Ep. Fest.* 32 (SC 317, p.260).

<sup>274</sup> *Vita Pachomii—Graeca* 137-138 (Athanassakis, pp.180-182). The reply of the monks agrees closely with the warning Athanasius gave in the *Ad Mon. I* (PG 26, col.1185-1188).

<sup>275</sup> *Vita Pachomii—Bohairic* 200 (Veilleux, p.249).

<sup>276</sup> *Vita Pachomii—Graeca* 143 (Athanassakis, pp.186-188); *Vita Pachomii—Bohairic* 201 (Veilleux, pp.249-251).

<sup>277</sup> *Vita Pachomii—Graeca* 144 (Athanassakis, pp.188-190); *Vita Pachomii—Bohairic* 202 (Veilleux, pp.251-252).

<sup>278</sup> *Ad Ors. I* (PG 26, col.977). See also Athanasius' report concerning Theodore recorded in the *Epistula Ammonis* 34 (Goehring, pp.156-157). L. W. Barnard claims that this letter represented an intervention of the archbishop to establish harmony between the two abbots. However, nothing in either report can be used to represent such an intention. Cf. Barnard, 'Athanasius and the Pachomians,' p.8.

<sup>279</sup> Barnard, 'Athanasius and the Pachomians,' pp.8-9.

Athanasius ended the fourth exile when Julian died in June 363. Afterwards, he seems to have been very busy. He had to meet the new emperor Jovian before he could formally return to Alexandria and resume his office in February 364.<sup>280</sup> Not long after Valens was appointed Augustus, Athanasius was banished the fifth time. He could not carry out his normal episcopal duties until the notary Bresidas came in February 366 with an imperial letter permitting him to return to the city and hold the churches as usual.<sup>281</sup> Only about six months later, the Alexandrian Christians were attacked by the heathens and the church of the Caesareum was burnt.<sup>282</sup> In spite of these continual accidents, Athanasius is found to have appeared in the diocese of Šmoun again in April 368.<sup>283</sup> On hearing of the death of Theodore, the archbishop immediately wrote a letter to Orsisius comforting him as well as the brethren with him. In the letter, the author asks the monks not to grieve for the deceased abbot and explains that he was not dead (οὐ ἀπέθανεν), but was asleep (ἀλλὰ καθεύδει). After the solace, he charges Orsisius to take up Theodore's place and accept all his responsibility.<sup>284</sup> Throughout his episcopate, Athanasius incessantly acted as a faithful supporter and sensitive consoler for the monks. He cared for the operation of the monasteries as well as the inner needs of the brethren.

Through his lifelong effort for the monastic movement, Athanasius gradually gained general acclamation from the churches, especially the ascetics. Many monks, both inside and outside his diocese, sought help and advice from him. In Julian's time, it happened that the pagans attacked the tomb of John the Baptist in Sebaste, a city of Palestine. Meantime, some monks from the monastery of Philip (*monasterio Philippi*) arrived there. They tried their best to save the relics and brought them to Philip. Thinking it beyond him to guard such a treasure, the abbot sent the relics to Athanasius. Receiving them, the archbishop closed them up within a hollowed-out place in the sacristy wall (*sacrarum pariete*) in the presence of a few witnesses (*paucis arbitris*).<sup>285</sup> Not long after that, a priest-monk Innocent, who had been one of the palace dignitaries (τῶν ἐπιδόξων ἐν τῷ παλατίῳ) in the time of Constantius, came to the monastic life on the Mount of Olives.<sup>286</sup> He was soon joined by another priest-monk Palladius, apparently from Basil's monastic community at Caesarea, in the early 370s.<sup>287</sup> At that time, some conflicts had arisen between Basil and his monks. Palladius presented the case as well as his reason for

<sup>280</sup> *Historia Acephala* 4.4-6 (SC 317, pp.152-158); index to *Ep. Fest.* 35 (SC 317, p.264).

<sup>281</sup> *Historia Acephala* 5.1-7 (SC 317, pp.158-162); index to *Ep. Fest.* 37 (SC 317, p.268).

<sup>282</sup> Index to *Ep. Fest.* 38 (SC 317, p.268). For a discussion of the historical events in this period, see Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, pp.162-163.

<sup>283</sup> *Vita Pachomii—Bohairic* 210 (Veilleux, p.264). For a discussion of the date, see Barnard, *The Monastic Letters of Saint Athanasius the Great*, p.xvi.

<sup>284</sup> *Ad Ors. II* (PG 26, col.977-980).

<sup>285</sup> Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.28 (PL 21, col.536).

<sup>286</sup> Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* 44 (Butler, 2:131).

<sup>287</sup> D. Chitty dates it to 'not long after AD 370.' Cf. Chitty, *The Desert a City*, p.49.

staying with Innocent to Athanasius. Written near the end of his life, Athanasius' *Epistula ad Palladium* once again displays the archbishop's deep concern for the world-wide monastic movement. He tried his best to reduce conflicts within it. In addition to affirming the goodness of Basil, he wrote another letter to the monks at Caesarea and urged them to obey their father.<sup>288</sup>

Of course, some of the above records may not be totally true. However, Athanasius' intense involvement in the fourth-century monastic movement is undeniable. Driven by the personal conviction displayed in his theology and spiritual teachings, he promoted asceticism and monasticism everywhere. Unlike other ascetics concentrating solely on their own spiritual advancement, he tried his best to direct people to God. His target was not limited to those in his diocese, but involved people all over the world. As we have seen, every stage of his episcopal career is full of evidences demonstrating his concern for the catholic monastic movement. He encouraged others repeatedly to walk on the way to God, supported and cared for the monks, and helped to solve monastic problems wherever possible. As his episcopal and literary career, Athanasius' ascetic and monastic career is fully consistent with his spirituality. He seems to have acted faithfully according to what he conceived as his vocation from God.

### **C. Applications of His Spirituality on the Arian Controversy**

Although Athanasius was as we have shown fully devoted to his ascetic ideal and was quite reluctant in responding to his opponents at the early stage, he could not detach himself from the fourth-century controversy. From the time when he was consecrated, an unavoidable heavy ecclesiastical burden was imposed on him. His predecessor and mentor Alexander left him a mandate to defend the orthodox Nicene faith against the incessant objection from the adversaries. As C. Kannengiesser says, his determination was not his own choice, but was the duty imposed by his own faith community.<sup>289</sup> Having succeeded as the archbishop of the metropolitan Alexandria, he automatically became the major target of the attacks of the Arians and Melitians. Throughout the ecclesiastical battle, Athanasius frequently acted as a passive defendant who was repeatedly accused by the enemies. The opponents never gave up their accusations against him. Since the entire Arian controversy is extremely complex, it is impossible for us to discuss every aspect about it in detail here. To be practical, only two key issues, namely the causes of its origin and its result, will be included here. As we will see, every decision and judgement of the archbishop in the controversy is consistent with his spirituality. His behaviour was decisively determined by his own religious conviction.

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<sup>288</sup> *Ad Pall.* (PG 26, col.1168-1169).

<sup>289</sup> Kannengiesser, 'Athanasius of Alexandria and the Ascetic Movement of His Time,' p.487.

## 1. Origin: Theological Debate and the Readmission of Arius

Athanasius' first formal encounter with the Arians was at the Council of Nicaea, where he acted as the secretary of his bishop Alexander. In the ecumenical council, the Nicene Creed was formulated, and the Arian doctrinal view explicated in the pamphlet *Thalia* was condemned as heretical. Arius was excommunicated together with some of his adherents.<sup>290</sup> Although Eusebius of Nicomedia and Theognis of Nicaea had subscribed to the articles of faith, they refused to subscribe also to the anathemas condemning Arius.<sup>291</sup> Being unable to follow fully the orders of the council, they were subsequently deposed and banished as well. Possibly through the intervention of Constantine's dying sister Constantia, Arius and his fellow Euzoïos were summoned to the imperial palace to explain their view before the emperor.<sup>292</sup> Having submitted a declaration of faith apparently conforming to the Nicene Creed, they successfully obtained the acceptance of Constantine.<sup>293</sup> Following the recantation of Arius, Eusebius and Theognis were allowed to restore back to their sees a few months later. The emperor wrote a letter to Alexander pressing him to accept Arius and Euzoïos back in Alexandria.<sup>294</sup> However, before the arrival of the letter, Alexander died on 17 April 328. At the time when Athanasius was elevated to the throne of Saint Mark, he was seriously pressed by the Arian bishops as well as the emperor to readmit Arius.

In the *Apologia Secunda*, Athanasius protests that Eusebius of Nicomedia having secretly allied with the Melitians threatened him in verbal communications to admit Arius and his fellows to communion. When Athanasius refused, Eusebius caused Constantine to write to the Alexandrian bishop threatening him with deposition and exile.<sup>295</sup> The same incident was recorded in the church history of Socrates, which later

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<sup>290</sup> *Urkunde* 23; Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.9 (PG 67, col.77-84); Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.20 (PG 67, col.920); Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.5 (PL 21, col.472). Concerning the proceedings of the council, see Luibhéid, *The Council of Nicaea*, pp.67-124.

<sup>291</sup> *Urkunde* 31; Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.14 (PG 67, col.109-113); Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.16 (PG 67, col.972-976).

<sup>292</sup> *Urkunde* 30; Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.25 (PG 67, col.148-149); Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.11 (PL 21, col.483). Both Socrates and Rufinus suggest the intervention of Constantia. However, the actual reason is uncertain.

<sup>293</sup> Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.26, 1.38 (PG 67, col.149-152, 176); Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.11 (PL 21, col.483-484). Concerning the date of Arius' recantation, while T. D. Barnes puts it to 327 just before a so-called Council of Nicomedia, T. G. Elliott argues that it must be one year earlier in 326 in order to allow sufficient time for the preparation of the 327 council. Cf. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, pp.17-18; Elliott, *The Christianity of Constantine the Great*, p.237.

<sup>294</sup> *Urkunde* 32. For discussions of the historical events in this post-Nicene period, see Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, pp.67-76; and Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, pp.17-18.

<sup>295</sup> *Apol. Ar.* 59 (PG 25, col.357). In the apologia, a letter from Constantine is included. The emperor wrote there, 'For if I learn that you have hindered or excluded any who claim to be admitted into communion with the Church, I will immediately send some one who shall depose you by my command (ἀποστελῶ παραυτίκα τὸν καὶ καθαιρήσονται σε ἐξ ἡμῆς κελεύσεως), and shall remove you from your place (τῶν τόπων μεταστήσονται).'



further explains that Constantine's banishment of Athanasius after the Synod of Tyre was in the consideration of the establishment of unity in the church (σκοπῶ τοῦ ἐνωθῆναι τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν). For the emperor, the Alexandrian bishop was inexorable in his refusal to hold any communion with Arius and his adherents (πάντη κοινωνῆσαι τοῖς περὶ Ἀρείου ἐξετρέπετο).<sup>296</sup> Indubitably, Athanasius' firm refusal to readmit Arius was one of the most key factors for his being attacked by the opponents. While all the previous conflicts including the Melitian objection to his enthronement are something out of his own control, this refusal is certainly an autonomous decision made by him. The reason why he insisted on this choice is crucial for our understanding of his thought. If he suggested peace and pardon in his writings, why did he refuse to readmit Arius and his fellows?<sup>297</sup> Since Arius had formally submitted a declaration of faith showing his recantation, no matter whether this is sincere or not, readmitting him into the Alexandrian church should have no serious harm to Athanasius' personal status. His refusal was against the will of the emperor and was surely not beneficial to his own career. If he was a power-hungry politician as E. Schwartz portrayed, this insistence must be judged as one of the poorest political strategies.<sup>298</sup> It seems that his decision was about something more than personal or episcopal ambition.

Here, it is worth observing that Athanasius is not the only bishop who refused to receive Arius. In the *Epistula ad Episcopos Aegypti et Libyae* and *Epistula ad Serapionem de Morte Aarii*, he mentions that when the Eusebians threatened to bring Arius into church, Alexander of Constantinople resisted them and prayed privately for the intervention of God.<sup>299</sup> The same incident was recorded by several ancient historians including Socrates, Sozomen and Rufinus. Since there are many extra details in their reports, they seem to have consulted independent witnesses other than those known to Athanasius.<sup>300</sup> Under the threat of being deposed, Alexander of Constantinople still refused to admit Arius to communion. It appears that there existed real difficulties for a contemporary orthodox bishop to receive Arius and his fellows.

Before proceeding into the discussion about the reasons why Athanasius refused to receive Arius, one must note that he invariably conceived the recantation as a trick.

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<sup>296</sup> Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.27, 1.35 (PG 67, col.152, 172).

<sup>297</sup> For the themes of peace and pardon in Athanasius' writings, see part B.1 of this chapter. Some scholars such as W. H. C. Frend argue that the archbishop had changed his tone in the final decade of his life. Cf. Frend, 'Athanasius as an Egyptian Christian Leader in the Fourth Century,' p.21, 35. However, as we have shown previously, Athanasius has already suggested peace in his festal epistles at an early stage of his episcopacy.

<sup>298</sup> Schwartz, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol.3, p.1, 72.

<sup>299</sup> *Ad Aeg. Lib.* 19 (PG 25, col.581); *Ad Serap. M. Ar.* 2-3 (PG 25, col.688).

<sup>300</sup> Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.37 (PG 67, col.173-176); Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.29 (PG 67, col.1017-1020); Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.12-13 (PL 21, col.485-486).

Because Arius pretended to accept the Nicene faith and had sworn falsely before Constantine, he was subsequently punished by the Lord in his sudden death.<sup>301</sup> This view was followed by ancient historians such as Socrates and Rufinus.<sup>302</sup> Since Arius died suddenly before being readmitted to the Alexandrian church, it is difficult to judge the sincerity of his act. On this point, T. G. Elliott argues that Arius had actually changed his theological position since he first published the *Thalia*. It is the views expounded in the reconciliatory letter to Alexander that he and his fellows including Eusebius of Nicomedia maintain.<sup>303</sup> Alexander has misrepresented the views of Arius' supporters, especially Eusebius of Nicomedia.<sup>304</sup> They neither have a doctrine of the mutability of the Son nor propose that the Son was not true God. Arius at that time has used the phrase 'begotten' (γεννηθεῖς) and 'created and founded' (κτισθεῖς καὶ θεμελιωθεῖς) instead of his earlier 'created' (κτισθεῖς). The creation out of what did not exist has disappeared.<sup>305</sup> Elliott even goes so far as to suggest that Eusebius of Nicomedia was 'never anything like a perfect Arian.' He subscribed the Nicene Creed sincerely since he had never followed the Arianism of the *Thalia*, which the ecumenical council condemned.<sup>306</sup>

This suggestion demonstrates that Elliott is not a theologian. He fails to recognise the theological difference between the Arian letter to Alexander and the Nicene Creed. Although the Eusebians have not said explicitly that the Son was not true God, they constantly emphasise that the Father alone (μόνος) is God (ὁ Θεός) and differentiate the Son from the Father. He is not eternal (αἰδιος) or co-unoriginate (συναγένητος) with the Father, nor has He His being together with the Father (οὐδὲ ἅμα τῷ Πατρὶ τὸ εἶναι ἔχει). Although Arius has used other terms such as 'begotten' (γεννηθεῖς), he still maintains that the Son was 'created' (κτισθεῖς) and is a 'creature' (κτίσμα). He is neither a part (μέρος) of God nor one in essence (ὁμοούσιος) with the Father. Although the phrase

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<sup>301</sup> In his *Epistula ad Episcopos Aegypti et Libyae*, Athanasius describes in detail the process in which Arius gained the consent of Constantine. When Arius was summoned and was required to present a written declaration of his faith, he wrote one (ἔγραψεν), but kept out of sight the peculiar expressions of his view (κρύπτων μὲν τὰς ἰδίας τῆς ἀσεβείας λέξεις), and pretended to quote some verses from the Scriptures. When Constantine asked him if he held no other opinions besides what he had quoted, Arius swore that he held no other thought other than what he had written. However, as soon as he went out, he dropped down as if paying the penalty of his crime. Cf. *Ad Aeg. Lib.* 18 (PG 25, col.580-581). The historicity of this account is questionable. However, it is worth observing that Athanasius regards the recantation of Arius as a trick everywhere in his writings. It seems that this account has more or less reflected what he personally believed.

<sup>302</sup> While Socrates regards Arius' recantation as an 'artifice of suppressing the truth' (ἡ κατασκευὴ τῆς σωπαμένης ἀληθείας), Rufinus directly calls it 'trick' (*dolus*). Cf. Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.27 (PG 67, col.152); Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.11 (PL 21, col.484).

<sup>303</sup> The letter to Alexander was quoted by Athanasius in *De Syn.* 16 (PG 26, col.708-712 = *Urkunde* 6). For easy reference, the text is reproduced in Appendix D.2 of this thesis.

<sup>304</sup> *Urkunde* 4b; Alexander, *Epistula Encyclica* 1-7 (PG 18, col.572-577).

<sup>305</sup> Elliott, *The Christianity of Constantine the Great*, pp.148-157.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.226-227.

creation out of what did not exist has disappeared, the statement that the Son ‘was not before His generation’ (οὐκ ἦν πρὸ τοῦ γεννηθῆναι) remains.<sup>307</sup> All these are contradictory with the Nicene Creed, which declares definitely that the Son is ‘very God of very God’ (Θεὸν ἀληθινὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ ἀληθινοῦ), ‘begotten not made’ (γεννηθέντα, οὐ ποιηθέντα), ‘one in essence with the Father’ (ὁμοούσιον τῷ Πατρὶ) and those who say that He ‘was not before His generation’ (οὐκ ἦν πρὸ τοῦ γεννηθῆναι) are to be anathematised.<sup>308</sup> Under the standard of the Creed, there is no significant difference between the Christology of the *Thalia* and that of the Arian letter of faith submitted to Alexander. The suggestion that Arius has changed his theological position substantially before the Council of Nicaea is unsustainable. Unless Eusebius of Nicomedia has changed his mind radically, which is scarcely to be true in view of his attitude and activities in the later Arian controversy, I see no reason for rejecting the possibility that he subscribed to the Nicene Creed disingenuously.<sup>309</sup>

Although the sincerity of the recantation of Arius is indeterminate, it is certain that Athanasius did not believe his repentance. His reasons for refusing to receive Arius may be divided into three. The first one is ecclesiastical. According to his *Apologia Secunda*, when Athanasius was asked to receive Arius and his fellows, his first reply is that ‘it was not right that those who had invented heresy contrary to the truth (τοὺς αἵρεσιν ἐφευρόντας κατὰ τῆς ἀληθείας), and had been anathematised by the ecumenical council (ἀναθεματισθέντας παρὰ τῆς οἰκουμενικῆς συνόδου), should be admitted to communion.’<sup>310</sup> Throughout his lifelong struggle with the Arians, the Council of Nicaea was quoted repeatedly. Seemingly, Athanasius was suggesting that, since Arius as well as his theological view was condemned by about three hundred bishops in the Council of Nicaea, readmitting him into the church would imply disobedience to the decisions of the council, which was itself a condemnable act. Unless another ecumenical council was convened, the determinations of the Council of Nicaea could not be overturned. Although the readmission of Arius seems to have been agreed in certain local synods, the number of bishops who attended is insufficient. It seems to me that this reason is valid, but rather selective and weak. At present, we still do not know whether or not the Council of Nicaea

<sup>307</sup> *Urkunde* 6; *De Syn.* 16 (PG 26, col.709). After reading Arius’ declaration of faith, Eusebius of Caesarea immediately wrote a firm letter to Alexander defending the presbyter’s view. In the letter, he queries, ‘But if He who is is not alone, but the Son also was, then how did He who is beget Him who was?’ It is certain that before the Council of Nicaea, the Arian party still maintained that the Son was not. Cf. *Urkunde* 7. The letter is extracted from the Acts of the Second Council of Nicaea in 787.

<sup>308</sup> *Urkunde* 22, 24; Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.8 (PG 67, col.72-73); Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.6 (PL 21, col.472-473).

<sup>309</sup> There exists an apologetic treatise written in the name of Arius defending the Arian theological position. However, after serious examination, Stead judges it as pseudepigraphical, which cannot have been written during Arius’ lifetime. Cf. G. C. Stead, ‘The Arian controversy: a new perspective,’ *Ermeneumata*, ed. H. Eisenberger (Heidelberg, 1990), pp.51-59.

<sup>310</sup> *Apol. Ar.* 59 (PG 25, col.357).

described itself as ‘ecumenical’ in any official document. It appears that its supreme status was not fully established at that time.<sup>311</sup> However, this does not mean that it could be regarded as an ordinary local synod. The fact that Constantius tried every effort to convene another ‘ecumenical’ council in 359 to supersede the decisions of the Nicene council suggests that there was real need. On top of ecclesiastical reason, there was clearly another personal motive for Athanasius’ emphasis of the 325 council. That is its positive support to his theological position. As stated before, the orthodox Nicene faith was primarily drafted by Alexander’s party. Defence for this faith was for Athanasius a sacred task he succeeded to this reverend father and was central to his own spirituality and theology.<sup>312</sup>

Athanasius’ second reason of rejecting Arius is religious. Receiving a warning letter from Constantine commanding him to admit Arius and his fellows to the church, Athanasius immediately wrote and endeavoured to convince the emperor that ‘anti-Christian heresy had no communion with the Catholic Church’ (μηδεμίαν εἶναι κοινωνίαν τῇ Χριστομάχῳ αἵρέσει πρὸς τὴν καθολικὴν Ἐκκλησίαν).<sup>313</sup> Here, two important patristic concepts must be noted. Firstly, all heresies are from the devil. Early at the time of Hippolytus, heresy was conceived as demonic attack on Christianity.<sup>314</sup> Athanasius followed this view and called the Arian heresy ‘opponents of Christ’ (ἡ ἐναντία τοῦ Χριστοῦ αἵρεσις) stirred up by the devil.<sup>315</sup> Secondly, communion is a spiritual union existing between every Christian, whether in heaven or on earth.<sup>316</sup> For this reason, Athanasius frequently asked his congregation to celebrate the paschal feast with saints and angels.<sup>317</sup> These two patristic concepts suggest that having communion with heresy is equivalent to betraying the Lord and uniting with the devil. For those ancient Christians devoted to their religion, displeasing God is even more terrible than offending the emperor. As Arius was judged a heretic and Athanasius never believed his recantation, his firm refusal to readmit him to communion is intelligible.

<sup>311</sup> The first examples of the term ‘ecumenical council’ being applied to the Nicene Council are Eusebius’ *Vita Constantini* and the 338 Egyptian Council of Alexandria. At that time, it was a well-established term used by the professional association of athletes and Dionysiac artists. It implies worldwide nature and often embraces authority. Cf. H. Chadwick, ‘The Origin of the Title “Oecumenical Council,”’ *JThS* NS 23 (1972):132-135.

<sup>312</sup> For the influence of Alexander on Athanasius and the role of the Nicene faith in his spirituality, see Chapter One part A.1 and A.2.a of this thesis.

<sup>313</sup> *Apol. Ar.* 60 (PG 25, col.357).

<sup>314</sup> Cf. Hippolytus, *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium* 6.7.1, 6.39.1, 6.41.1 (PTS 25, p.212, 256, 258).

<sup>315</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 10.9-10 (Cureton, pp.50-51). Besides, Athanasius also says explicitly, ‘But after him [the devil] and with him are all inventors of unlawful heresies.’ *Ep. Fest.* 24.6 (Cureton, pp.23-24).

<sup>316</sup> ‘Communion of Saint,’ *ODCC*, p.387.

<sup>317</sup> E.g. *Ep. Fest.* 1.10, 6.12, and 7.10 (Cureton, p.19, α-α, αα).



The third reason Athanasius disallowed Arius to return to the Alexandrian church is pastoral. He tried every effort to separate the Arians from his flock in case ‘they may deceive the simple’ (τοὺς ἀκεραίους ἐξαπατῶσι).<sup>318</sup> As we have shown, Athanasius’ lifelong career is to guide people onto the way to heaven. These spiritual teachings are based on his theology, which is centred at the saving acts of God. Arianism is totally incompatible with his doctrinal view and is for him surely destructive to the promotion of his ascetic vision. So, their spread in the church must be prohibited. Here, it is worth observing that although repentant Arian leaders were pardoned in the 362 Synod of Alexandria as well as similar synods in Spain and Gaul, they were prevented from publicising their views by not giving them the position of clergy.<sup>319</sup> It appears that this pastoral concern was not limited to Athanasius alone, but was considered by many other contemporary orthodox bishops as well.

Athanasius’ firm refusal to readmit Arius may seem to be too harsh and dictatorial for modern standards. However, according to our discussions above, it might not be totally unreasonable for people in late antiquity. As we can see, all the three reasons above are consistent with Athanasius’ own spiritual conviction, which is part of his life. Like other religious devotees, he was simply doing what he believed to be true and right. In the entire process against the readmission of Arius, personal enmity with the opponents seems to have never become his central concern. In his writings, Athanasius does not only recommend excommunication of the Arians, but also all the heresies.<sup>320</sup> Fulfilling his vocation by directing the mind of people to God and preventing them from being led astray remains at the centre of his career.

At the end, it is necessary to make a special remark here that although Athanasius refused firmly to readmit Arius, he nowhere suggests the use of violence. In contrast, he condemns violence everywhere. He portrays persecution as a device of the devil,<sup>321</sup> and blames those who have recourse to violence.<sup>322</sup> He claims firmly that truth is not preached with swords (ξίφεσιν), with darts (βέλεσιν), or by means of soldiers (διὰ στρατιωτῶν), but by persuasion (πειθοῖ) and counsel (συμβουλίᾳ).<sup>323</sup> All these are assertions found in his open treatises. On this account, D. W.-H. Arnold queries the anti-Athanasian charges recorded in London papyrus 1914, ‘Would he be willing to expose himself to the charge of duplicity in such an open manner if he was known to be guilty of such crimes?’<sup>324</sup> As

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<sup>318</sup> *Ad Mon. I* (PG 26, col.1188).

<sup>319</sup> *Ad Ruf.* (PG 26, col.1180-1181).

<sup>320</sup> *Hist. Ar.* 80 (PG 25, col.792).

<sup>321</sup> *Apol. Fuga* 23 (PG 25, col.673).

<sup>322</sup> *Apol. Ar.* 2 (PG 25, col.249).

<sup>323</sup> *Hist. Ar.* 33 (PG 25, col.732).

<sup>324</sup> Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, pp.87-88.

mentioned before, the papyrus is only one of the dubious Arian charges against the bishop.<sup>325</sup> From the numerous evidences found in his writings, especially his festal epistles, we see that Athanasius is anti-violent. Even if the account of the London papyrus 1914 is historically true, it is still possible that Athanasius, instead of commanding the attacks of Melitians, tried his best, though he failed, to prevent the violence of his adherents. These Alexandrians long had a reputation for being unruly, volatile, and easily inflamed.<sup>326</sup> The bishop asked them eagerly in nearly every paschal letter to neglect the earthly battle and concentrate only on religious piety. Throughout the so-called anti-Athanasian records, no single 'proven' solid evidence pointing to the violence of the archbishop himself may be discerned.

## 2. Result: Long Patience and the Final Victory in Adverse Situation

Athanasius' struggle with the Arians and Melitians began with an initial victory.<sup>327</sup> However, not long after that, he was accused by the opponents again. After the 335 Synod of Tyre, he was banished to Gaul by Constantine. Before that, Athanasius seems to have had certain political supports in the imperial household. Nevertheless, after returning from the exile, all these supports suddenly disappeared. Just after the death of his father Constantine, Constantinus wrote a letter to the Alexandrian church justifying their banished bishop. In the letter, the Caesar explains that Athanasius was sent away into Gaul in order to protect him from the savageness of his bloodthirsty enemies. The same letter also mentions that it was the intention of the deceased emperor to restore him to his own see.<sup>328</sup> These passages have long been regarded as purely fictitious and are ignored by most modern scholars. It was through the recent study of D. W.-H. Arnold that new meaning was given to them as well as to the sudden disappearance of Athanasius' imperial support in the eastern empire.<sup>329</sup>

According to official pronouncements, Constantine died on 22 May 337, shortly after having been baptised by Eusebius of Nicomedia. He was buried in Constantinople by his second son Constantius, who seemingly had just arrived. On 9 September 337, his three sons Constantinus, Constantius, and Constans were proclaimed Augusti.<sup>330</sup> Apparently, it is an orderly succession. Nonetheless, there exist some contrasting reports

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<sup>325</sup> See part A of this chapter.

<sup>326</sup> Cf. Lewis, *Life in Egypt under Roman Rule*, p.201.

<sup>327</sup> Athanasius was first accused by the opponents in 330/331. After clearing all the charges, he returned to Alexandria with glory. Cf. Index to *Ep. Fest.* 3 (SC 317, p.228); *Ep. Fest.* 4.1 (Cureton, pp.32-33).

<sup>328</sup> *Apol. Ar.* 87 (PG 25, col.405).

<sup>329</sup> Arnold, 'Plots and Accusations: Athanasius and the Death of Constantine,' pp.347-353.

<sup>330</sup> Eusebius, *Vita Imperatoris Constantini* 4.61-70 (PG 20, col.1212-1225); Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.39-40 (PG 67, col.177-180); Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.34 (PG 67, col.1029-1032).

suggesting that a bloody purge took place in the interregnum in which many important members of the imperial household were removed. Within a few months, Constantius killed his paternal uncles Julius Constantius and Flavius Dalmatius, and most of his cousins including Dalmatius Caesar and Hannibalianus. Besides, Optatus the patricius and Ablabius the praetorian prefect were also put to death.<sup>331</sup> Here, Flavius Dalmatius and Ablabius were both supporters of Athanasius. They had helped him in various ways during the early years of his episcopacy.<sup>332</sup> The purge had taken away all the political support of Athanasius in the East and forced him to seek help from the west.

According to Philostorgius, the purge was justified by a secret testament Eusebius of Nicomedia hid in the linens of Constantine's deathbed, in which the dying emperor charged his brothers with having poisoned him and asked his descendants to avenge his death.<sup>333</sup> After detailed examinations, Arnold points out that the content of this testament is distinct from that referred to by Eusebius of Caesarea and was almost certainly a forgery produced by Eusebius of Nicomedia.<sup>334</sup> As T. D. Barnes says, Constantius clearly profited most from the executions. He eliminated all his dynastic rivals and established his own political power in the purge.<sup>335</sup> The forged testament dismissed all the charges of his cruel murders. Rewarding the 'exploit' of Eusebius, the new emperor gave him extraordinary privileges. After the purge, only two male members of the imperial household, Gallus and Julian, survived. They were both entrusted to him.<sup>336</sup> At that time, the most important ecclesiastical opponents against him in the East were the archbishops of Alexandria and of Constantinople. Just one month after Constantius was enthroned as the eastern emperor, the orthodox bishop Paul of Constantinople was deposed and Eusebius himself was promoted in place of him.<sup>337</sup> Within eighteen months, he successfully forced Athanasius to go into exile and substituted him with Gregory the

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<sup>331</sup> Zosimus, *Historia Nova* 2.40 (Buchanan & Davis, pp.80-81); Julian, *Epistula ad Athenienses* 270 C-D (Wright, 2:248).

<sup>332</sup> Arnold, 'Plots and Accusations: Athanasius and the Death of Constantine,' pp.351-352.

<sup>333</sup> Philostorgius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.4, 2.16 (GCS 21, pp.14-17, 26-28).

<sup>334</sup> Arnold, 'Plots and Accusations: Athanasius and the Death of Constantine,' p.350; Eusebius, *Vita Imperatoris Constantini* 4.63 (PG 20, col.1220). Here, it is good to recall that Athanasius had accused Eusebius and his fellows of forging documents several times. Less than two years before the composition of the secret testament, the Eusebians had forged a letter, which they attributed to Athanasius at the 335 Synod of Tyre. After the death of Constans, they again charged Athanasius with a spurious correspondence with Magnentius and also with Constantius. Cf. *Apol. Ar.* 77 (PG 25, col.389); *Apol. Const.* 6, 19 (PG 25, col.601-604, 620).

<sup>335</sup> Barnes, *Eusebius and Constantius*, p.262. Constantius originally had to share the empire with Dalmatius Caesar, with Julius Constantius, and with Hannibalianus as Zosimus mentioned. The elimination of these imperial members made the whole eastern empire under his reign. Cf. Zosimus, *Historia Nova* 2.39 (Buchanan & Davis, p.80).

<sup>336</sup> For the growth and education of Gallus and Julian, see Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 3.1 (PG 67, col.368-380) and Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5.2 (PG 67, col.1212-1217).

<sup>337</sup> *Apol. Ar.* 6 (PG 25, col.260); Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.6-7 (PG 67, col.192-193); Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 3.3-4 (PG 67, col.1037-1040).

Cappadocian of his party.<sup>338</sup> On this account, it is not unreasonable for Arnold to conclude that Eusebius of Nicomedia profited from the purge perhaps second only to Constantius himself.<sup>339</sup>

It was under this adverse situation that Athanasius fought his religious battle with the opponents. Throughout the reign of Constantius, the Eusebians were favoured and supported by imperial authority. After the death of Constans in 350, Constantius became sole emperor of the whole Roman Empire. The sudden disappearance of Athanasius' support was repeated in the west. Pope Liberius of Rome was ordered to accept the condemnation of Athanasius. Refusing to do so, he was banished from Rome by Constantius in 355. Two years later, he submitted to the emperor and was permitted to reoccupy his see in 358.<sup>340</sup> Hosius of Cordova, the former ecclesiastical adviser to Constantine, was detained at Sirmium in 355 for his support of Athanasius. Under duress, he signed in 357 the 'blasphemy,' which involved concessions to the Arians.<sup>341</sup> Together with these two dominant figures in the west, many orthodox bishops, presbyters, and deacons were banished.<sup>342</sup> Although Athanasius was isolated and all his supporters were persecuted, he continued to fight for the Nicene faith without being disheartened. Under such a terrible situation that even his life was greatly threatened, his final victory in the Arian controversy may be said to be a miracle. While nearly all other factors were unfavourable to him, his success must at least partly be attributed to religious reasons. Amongst others, two important factors which made a great contribution in his triumph may be discerned here.

#### **a) Personal Religious Conviction: Comfort in God**

Out of forty-six years as bishop, Athanasius had spent seventeen in exile. Under the great persecutions in the time of Constantius, he continued to fight the religious battle with his pen. During this difficult period, he not only wrote apologias vindicating himself, but also composed many theological works justifying the orthodox doctrine and spiritual treatises exhorting his supporters. Although his life was being sought, he still defended the Nicene faith and promoted his ascetic ideal zealously.<sup>343</sup> He seems to have endless energy, which did not diminish even at the time of tribulation. It is undeniable that his unfailing insistence in the controversy was one of the major factors for his

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<sup>338</sup> Index to *Ep. Fest.* 11 (SC 317, pp.236-238); Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.10-11 (PG 67, col.200-208); Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 3.5-6 (PG 67, col.1041-1048).

<sup>339</sup> Arnold, 'Plots and Accusations: Athanasius and the Death of Constantine,' p.353.

<sup>340</sup> *Hist. Ar.* 35-41 (PG 25, col.733-741).

<sup>341</sup> *Hist. Ar.* 42-45 (PG 25, col.741-749).

<sup>342</sup> *Hist. Ar.* 46 (PG 25, col.749-752). For a modern discussion of the history in this period, see Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, chap.XIII.

<sup>343</sup> For his episcopal and monastic career, see part B of this chapter.



victory. If he had become discouraged in the meantime, he certainly could not have won the battle at the end. What is the underlying conviction that constituted this unfailing insistence? Again, we find that the archbishop was devoted to and motivated by his spirituality. As shown before, Athanasius' doctrine on spiritual advancement involves purifying the soul with virtuous life, which consists of renouncing one's own worldly pleasure. Like the suffering of the martyrs and the monks, he considers enduring afflictions as a kind of ascetic practice, which can eventually help believers to walk on the way to God more successfully. This concept was expounded most clearly in his tenth festal epistle, which was composed just after his first exile. Here, he wrote to his flock, 'It is not right to fear if the gang that contended with Christ, should conspire against godliness; but we should the more please God through these things, and should consider such matters as the probation (ܠܡܚܒܐ) and exercise (ܠܬܝܪܒܐ) of a virtuous life.'<sup>344</sup> Instead of present afflictions, he urges his congregation to fix their eyes on spiritual pleasure. From his behaviour and insistence in the Arian controversy, it is almost certain that he was personally convinced by this religious conviction.

In addition to treating affliction as a means for purifying the soul, there is also a future hope of comfort in the spirituality of Athanasius. As many other Christians, he believes that God is righteous. He will reward the pious saints and punish the wicked sinners. Athanasius wrote in a paschal letter, 'In like manner those who suffer temporal afflictions (ܠܬܝܪܒܐ ܠܡܚܒܐ) here, finally having endured, attain comfort (ܠܠܝܬܐ), while those who here persecute are trodden under foot, and have no good end.'<sup>345</sup> Behind this conviction are the biblical teaching stated in the beatitudes and the long Christian tradition of martyrdom for the Lord.<sup>346</sup> Here, one should note that this hope of comfort is basically eschatological and not earthy. Athanasius nowhere mentions that he had the confidence of winning the battle before his death. He simply tried his best to live a virtuous life conforming to his religious belief so that he might receive what has been reserved for the saints in the kingdom of heaven (τὰ τοῖς ἁγίοις ἀποκείμενα ἐν τῇ τῶν οὐρανῶν βασιλείᾳ).<sup>347</sup>

Athanasius' lifelong career is to encourage and guide others to walk on the way to God, which is achieved by contemplating God with a pure soul through virtuous life. Like many other church fathers, he himself practised what he taught. Even at the time of tribulation, he seems to have still focused his attention on divine reality and was willing to endure afflictions for religious purposes. Here, F. Cayre is perhaps correct in saying that Athanasius' strength of soul was due more to his interior life than to his natural

<sup>344</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 10.7 (Cureton, p.48).

<sup>345</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 10.6 (Cureton, p.48).

<sup>346</sup> Mt. 5:10-12.

<sup>347</sup> *De Incarn.* 57 (Thomson, p.276).

talents.<sup>348</sup> Although his hope of comfort is eschatological, he was able to taste part of it before his death. Following the death of Constantius, all exiled bishops were permitted to return. Synods were convoked in different places throughout the empire and orthodox parties were united again. In the synods, it was decided that all lapsed priests were to be pardoned upon their repentance.<sup>349</sup> The huge influence of the Eusebians in the church during the reign of Constantius seems to have disappeared as soon as they lost their imperial backing. Although Athanasius was banished again for various reasons in the time of Julian and Valens, the degree of persecutions against the orthodox churches was much lower than before. After returning from the fifth exile in February 366, Athanasius was restored to his office in Alexandria and enjoyed a relatively peaceful life without many disturbances. Seeing that the Nicene faith was gradually established in the church and his ascetic ideal was widely practised by Christians, he should have gained comfort in the last few years of his episcopacy.

## **b) Communal Religious Belief: Reward in Heaven**

In addition to Athanasius' own effort, the loyalty of his numerous supporters is another undeniable factor for his final victory. Although the Eusebians were favoured by the emperor and supported by military force, multitudes of people including both clergy and laity were still loyal to him as well as his orthodox church. Not long after Constantius was proclaimed Augustus, the adherents of Athanasius were put under persecution. In a circular letter, Athanasius complained that at the time when Gregory entered Alexandria with the prefect Philagrius in March 339, his church was greatly outraged. Virgins were raped, monks were beaten, and a lot of priests and laymen were scourged and cast into prison.<sup>350</sup> After the death of the western emperor Constans, the most serious persecution against Athanasius and his supporters began. Although the multitude was able to resist the attack of Diogenes the Imperial Notary, the archbishop was forced to escape when Duke Syrianus and Hilary the Notary struck the Alexandrian church with 'all the legions of soldiers throughout Egypt and Libya' (*omnes per Egiptum ac Lybiam militum legiones*) in February 356.<sup>351</sup> When George entered the city later in the same month, the adherents of Athanasius were violently oppressed again.<sup>352</sup> As mentioned before, many church leaders including Liberius and Hosius were banished during this period for the sake of their pro-Athanasian position.<sup>353</sup> Although the persecution was extraordinarily severe, there were still people willing to hide and serve him. They did not

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<sup>348</sup> Cayre, *Manual of Patrology and History of Theology*, p.354.

<sup>349</sup> *Ad Ruf.* (PG 26, col.1180-1181).

<sup>350</sup> *Ad Episc.* 3-5 (PG 25, col.228-233).

<sup>351</sup> *Historia Acephala* 1.9-10 (SC 317, pp.142-144); index to *Ep. Fest.* 28 (SC 317, p.256).

<sup>352</sup> *Historia Acephala* 2.2 (SC 317, pp.144-146); index to *Ep. Fest.* 29 (SC 317, pp.256-258).

<sup>353</sup> *Hist. Ar.* 35-46 (PG 25, col.733-752).

fear for their life and were ready to suffer for him.<sup>354</sup> If Athanasius had not been assisted by these faithful supporters, he very probably would not have survived to the end of persecution.

What is the fundamental belief that made them so loyal to him and his hierarchy? Here, we again find something consistent with his spirituality. In his eleventh paschal letter, Athanasius urges his flock to have joy with the saints and count as nothing affliction and trials.<sup>355</sup> He explains this with the models of the saints, ‘But after this affliction, and sorrow, and sighing, when they depart from this world, a certain divine gladness (ἡδονὴ καὶ ἡσυχία), and pleasure (ἡδονή), and exultation (ἡσυχία) receives them, from which misery and sorrow, and sighing, flee away.’<sup>356</sup> It seems that, having been shepherded by the bishop for several years, more and more people of the Alexandrian church had accepted this spiritual ideal. What Athanasius believed had gradually become their personal conviction. They focused their minds on the rewards in heaven and put aside their earthly pleasure. Perhaps, the heroic story of Antony’s fighting the demons had been psychologically transformed into their battle with the heresies.<sup>357</sup> For this reason, they dared to resist the imperial authorities and were enthusiastic to suffer for their orthodox faith. This popularity of Athanasian spirituality was partly due to the culture and environment of fourth-century Egypt, and partly to the effort of the archbishop. Although Athanasius’ primary purpose was to obey his divine vocation and guide people to the way to God, he himself had certainly benefited from it. C. Kannengiesser is perhaps right in saying that ‘the secret power of the Athanasian spirituality emerged from the bishop’s clear perception of the church as a whole in the actualising process by which it forms the believing community into a liturgical, institutional, and theological celebration of the divine incarnation.’<sup>358</sup>

Shortly after the death of the pro-Athanasian emperor Jovian, Valens was appointed the Augustus of the East. With the intention of depressing the orthodox power in the church, he issued an edict in early 365 ordering that all bishops who had been deposed under Constantius and then restored to their sees under Julian should be expelled again.<sup>359</sup> After a series of negotiations between his supporters and the imperial officials, Athanasius was banished the fifth time in October 365. However, just four months later,

<sup>354</sup> See part B.2 of this chapter. Amongst others, the most evident example is that of the virgin Eudaemonis, who was bitterly tortured in the year 359/360 for her hiding Athanasius. Cf. Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* 63 (Butler, 2:158-159); index to *Ep. Fest.* 32 (SC 317, p.260).

<sup>355</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 11.12 (Cureton, p.33).

<sup>356</sup> *Ep. Fest.* 11.1 (Cureton, p.54).

<sup>357</sup> The Arian party is sometimes called ‘harbinger of Antichrist’ (πρόδρομος τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου) and is linked with the devil in Athanasius’ apologetic writings. Cf. *Or. Ar.* 1.1,7 (PG 26, col.13, 25).

<sup>358</sup> Kannengiesser, ‘The Spiritual Message of the Great Fathers,’ *CSp* 1:66.

<sup>359</sup> *Historia Acephala* 5.1 (SC 317, pp.158-160).

the same emperor issued another imperial letter allowing him to return and resume his office.<sup>360</sup> The reasons why Valens changed his mind have been variously discussed. Socrates suggests that Athanasius was restored because his multitudinous supporters had become seditious in impatience of his absence (διὰ τὴν αὐτοῦ ἀπουσίαν ὁ λαὸς πόθῳ τῷ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἔστασίαζε) and agitation was prevailing at Alexandria.<sup>361</sup> Sozomen adds that Valens had the fear of exciting the displeasure of the orthodox emperor Valentinian since the esteem of Athanasius was universally held (τὴν κρατοῦσαν περὶ Ἀθανασίου δόξαν).<sup>362</sup> In any case, the important role of his supporters in his restoration is explicit here.

In September 367, the rival Arian bishop of Alexandria Lucius secretly entered the city at night. As soon as his arrival became known, a vast number of people assembled and protested his entry. He was immediately expelled by the multitude and the episcopacy of Athanasius was kept undisturbed.<sup>363</sup> Exactly one year after that, the ageing archbishop began to build a church in Mendidium, which was called after his name. Within two years, the church was completed and dedicated.<sup>364</sup> After many struggles and sufferings, Athanasius finally rested in peace. Having appointed Peter as his successor, he died on 2 May 373.<sup>365</sup> Concerning the final peace in the last few years of his life, it is not an exaggeration to say that it was almost fully given by his loyal supporters. He dedicated his whole life to shepherding his flock and guiding them onto the way to heaven. At the end, he was himself rewarded from this divine mission.

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<sup>360</sup> *Historia Acephala* 5.2-7 (SC 317, pp.160-162); index to *Ep. Fest.* 37 (SC 317, p.268).

<sup>361</sup> Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 4.13 (PG 67, col.496-497). Here, it is worth noting that Julian's relative Procopius was proclaimed Augustus in Constantinople in September 365 and was seriously challenging the rule of Valens in the East. He could not take the risk of allowing discontentment to develop in Alexandria. Cf. Zosimus, *Historia Nova* 4.4-10 (Buchanan & Davis, pp.139-145); see also the discussion in Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, p.163.

<sup>362</sup> Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.12 (PG 67, col.1325).

<sup>363</sup> *Historia Acephala* 5.11-13 (SC 317, pp.166-168); index to *Ep. Fest.* 39 (SC 317, p.270).

<sup>364</sup> Index to *Ep. Fest.* 41-42 (SC 317, pp.272-274).

<sup>365</sup> Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 4.20 (PG 67, col.505-508); Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.19 (PG 67, col.1337-1340); Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.3 (PL 21, col.510-511).



## CONCLUSION

Spirituality is the innermost conviction of a person, which is often the ultimate cause for one's external behaviour. It is in spirituality that personal life experience and theology meet together. In the past, many Athanasian scholars have unsuitably separated his thought and his deeds. As a result, unfair charges are imposed on him. As illustrated in our present study, spirituality and theology were indivisible for the fathers. Theological view was an important part of their life. Their uncompromising insistence on Christian doctrine is fully intelligible. Since the Arian theology is 'heretical,' Athanasius followed his predecessor Alexander in rejecting Arius from his community. Such a repulse of 'heresy' was a commonly assumed duty for church leaders and was practised by many earlier fathers such as Irenaeus, Tertullian and Origen. Even if Athanasius behaved at times with unfriendliness or rivalry towards his opponents, it is still not unreasonable.

Basically, there are two seemingly opposite types of ancient records relating to the fourth-century controversy. While the majority are written for the orthodox, there exist a few counter records that report the events differently. These two groups of sources are so contradictory that they are in many cases irreconcilable. When one is believed to be true, the other must by the same token be judged as lying. The problem here is that the people who knew the controversy best were those who were involved deeply in it. The reliability of their writings is suspect. Other ancient, even contemporary, writers or historians inevitably had to borrow information from these people. Although some of them clearly had consulted materials from both sides, they unavoidably had to make their own subjective judgements. Sozomen is not exaggerating in recording that Constantine when facing the mutual accusations of the two parties was once 'at a loss to know whom to believe' (οὐκ εἶχε λοιπὸν ὅτῳ πιστεύσειεν).<sup>1</sup> This situation becomes more confusing when it appears that the emperors and the imperial officials investigating the case were themselves not unbiased. While Constantine, Constantius and Jovian were primarily friendly to Athanasius, Constantius, Julian and Valens were hostile to him. Most official sentences made seem to be not free from personal preference or political consideration. Since there are so many contradicting phenomena in our extant historical sources, the case cannot be satisfactorily settled even when all the evidence is fully examined.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.22 (PG 67, col.989).

<sup>2</sup> Concerning the use of ancient historical sources, some modern scholars have suggested that the record of Eusebius of Caesarea is the trustworthiest. However, many evidences have indicated that he was highly involved in the battle against Athanasius. For a discussion of his role in the Arian controversy and the intentions of his presentation in the *Vita Imperatoris Constantini*, see B. H. Warmington, 'Eusebius of Caesarea and Some Early Opponents of Athanasius,' *StP* 32 (1997):59-64. Gustaffson concludes after a long investigation, 'The principle that Eusebius followed in dealing with his sources, as well as in his

Formerly, Athanasius was commonly believed to be a saint who had suffered greatly for the sake of religion. Nevertheless, many modern critics have now presented a very different picture. As we have illustrated, many of their charges are unjustified. Is their presumption about the character of Athanasius undoubtedly correct? Is the evidence supporting his misbehaviour so strong? It seems that an alternative view is still possible.

In this thesis, we have tried to re-evaluate the problem from a new perspective of spirituality. Here, we find that Athanasius was mainly controlled and motivated by his inner spirituality, which was moulded by many factors including the Jewish and Greek cultures in Alexandria, the early Christian tradition, the teachings of the previous fathers, and the models of his mentors Alexander and Antony. Amongst others, the Scriptural facts and the Nicene faith are dominant. Based on them, he constitutes his theological system, which is proven to be both consistent and coherent. From this system, he develops his soteriology, which displays a balanced treatment between divine salvation and human free will. On the one hand, men are primarily saved by God. On the other hand, salvation requires human response. In the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of the divine Λόγος, nearly all the adverse results of men's fall are remedied. The remaining task that men need to do is to keep the will firmly to advance on the way to God by *contemplating God with a pure soul through virtuous life*. Christians should contemplate God through the remaining divine knowledge in their soul, the divine works in the cosmos, and the divine words in the Scriptures. In order to make this contemplation fruitful, they must also keep their souls pure by removing all bodily desires and living a virtuous life free of sin.<sup>3</sup>

Through the perspective of spirituality, we find that many modern scholars have misinterpreted the theology of Athanasius. For example, basing himself almost entirely on the internal structure of some major doctrinal treatises, K. Anatolios has falsely suggested that the intrinsic centre of his theological system was the distinction and simultaneous relation between God and the created universe. He has not considered his historical background, especially the great influence of his mentor Alexander on his spiritual life. As a result, he could not accurately identify the importance of the orthodox Nicene Christology in his theology.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, D. B. Brakke has mistakenly proposed

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treatment of material, was characterised and limited by his own ecclesiastical background and its theology.' B. Gustafsson, 'Eusebius' Principles in Handling His Sources, as Found in His *Church History* Books I-VII,' *StP* 4 (1961):441. Grant even says explicitly that what Eusebius tells about the Alexandrian situation is subject to 'almost limitless doubt and revision.' He 'can never be trusted if contradicted by a more reliable witness, hardly ever even if not contradicted.' R. M. Grant, 'Early Alexandrian Christianity,' *CH* 40 (1971):142. For historiographical methods of another two famous ancient historians Socrates and Sozomen, see T. M. Shaw, 'Wolves in sheep's clothing: the appearance of true and false piety [portraits of Athanasius and Julian by Socrates and Sozomen],' *StP* 29 (1997):127-132.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter One of this thesis.

<sup>4</sup> Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought*; see also Chapter One part A.2 of this thesis.

that Athanasius has replaced the traditional theme of knowledge with corruption. He fails to observe that the bishop has just modified the Origenist system to suit the new worldview brought about by his insistence on the full divinity of the Son, and the subsequent abandonment of the hierarchical cosmology and the pre-existence of the soul. Nearly every change he made may actually be traceable to these factors. He supplements the original intellectual theme with physical elements only to match his doctrine of creation out of nothing. A careful analysis of his works will show that divine contemplation remains at the centre of his soteriology. Although there is a big gap between Creator and creatures in his cosmology, he still follows the Alexandrian tradition and portrays a Christian's religious effort as an ascending journey. By using tools like the 'mirror' in the soul, he tries to bridge the big gap and suggests that man may approach God by divine contemplation. Instead of changing the tradition eagerly and radically, he seems to have modified the Origenist system only out of necessity.<sup>5</sup> In addition to a good knowledge of the entire theological system, spirituality, as well as the factors that constituted its formation, is very important for us to understand the thought of a father.

Athanasius' concept of spiritual advancement is expounded in greater detail and more practically in his spiritual treatises. Here, he suggests that all believers should exercise themselves according to the biblical teachings and the models of the saints, and should obey the timely vocation of God. They are virtues that both ascetic and ordinary Christians must have. To different types of believers, he gave practical ascetic instructions according to their particular situations. Regarding the paschal feast as a timely calling from God, he urged all members of his church to prepare themselves for it by intensifying their ascetic practices. Since Holy Land pilgrimage, public baths and spiritual marriage are not profitable to one's spiritual advancement, he inhibited the virgins from joining these activities and asked them to imitate the exemplar of Mary. As sleep deprivation and extreme awareness of avoiding natural excretion are harmful to one's concentration on God, he persuaded the monks to give up these practices. All these spiritual teachings have their ground from the Scriptures or early Christian tradition, and are conforming to Athanasius' own spirituality and theology. In these spiritual treatises, his ascetic ideal was presented and promoted.<sup>6</sup>

Concerning the ascetic teachings of Athanasius, D. B. Brakke argues that they were actually planned political tools for church formation. The bishop used them to stabilise the Alexandrian church against the threat from the rising monastic movement of his age. His approval of both marriage and virginity allowed all monks, virgins and ordinary

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<sup>5</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, p.146; see also Chapter One part B.1.b of this thesis.

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter Two of this thesis.

believers to stay in the same church under his control. His paschal program for average Christians shortened their distance from real ascetics. He asked the virgins to imitate Mary and prohibited them from Holy Land pilgrimage, public baths and spiritual marriage simply because he wanted to isolate them from the competing groups. By issuing opinions on matters of ascetic practice and appointing monks as bishops, he rallied the monastic groups to his side. Brakke has emphasised too much the political functions of Athanasius' spiritual teachings, and has failed to observe the personal interest of the bishop in asceticism. Disregarding the requirement of church formation, he had zealously advocated ascetic lifestyle throughout his episcopal career. In addition to supporting the monks in his diocese, he promoted monasticism wherever he went. Even at the time when he was banished to the West, he still brought with him some monks who could serve as living examples for the monastic way of life. Brakke's thesis is clearly unsustainable. He has focussed too much on external politics, and has underestimated the importance of inner spirituality in the life of Athanasius. Instead of the intentional political tools proposed by Brakke, the ascetic teachings of the bishop are much more likely to be concepts of intense personal conviction.<sup>7</sup>

In his most influential spiritual writing the *Vita Antonii*, Athanasius' ascetic ideal is concretised in the model of the hermit Antony. Narrating the life of his reverend abba from historical sources, Athanasius urges his readers eagerly to walk on the way to God. He demonstrates to the pagans that Christianity is much superior to their religions and philosophies, and invites them to convert and turn to the way that has been made accessible by Jesus. Through depicting the powerful life and glorious end of the hermit, he encourages the average Christians to take up ascetic practices by following the Antonian mode of lifestyle. To the monks, Athanasius teaches the way to complete the ascendant way by contemplating God with a pure soul through virtuous life as exercised by the deceased abba. In this hagiography, he embodied current abstract ascetic thought with an imitable model of a concrete figure and made the contemporary widespread monastic thirst more attainable. Although being in his third exile when his life was in danger, Athanasius still spent a lot of time to compose this treatise to direct the minds of people to the mystery of Christ, which was demonstrated in the life of the great hermit.<sup>8</sup>

The function of the *Vita Antonii* has been variously discussed by scholars. For example, R. C. Gregg and D. E. Groh suggest that the hagiography was a polemical vehicle used to undo threatening Arian bids for monastic support. In the treatise,

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<sup>7</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*; see also Chapter Two part B and C, and Chapter Four part B.2 of this thesis.

<sup>8</sup> See Chapter Three of this thesis.



Athanasius had intentionally forged an anti-Arian image for the hermit Antony.<sup>9</sup> Based on a presumption that Athanasius was a veteran politician having only limited contacts with Antony, D. B. Brakke also argues that the hagiography was a political tool used to unite the monks to the orthodox church in Egypt.<sup>10</sup> All of them have exaggerated the propagandising functions of the *Vita Antonii* and have misconstrued the original goals, as well as the real historical background, of the composition of the treatise. Instead of purely political, the author declares in the prologue and epilogue that the purposes of the treatise were primarily religious. Athanasius' good relationship with the hermit, his personal devotion in promoting monasticism, the internal evidences of the hagiography and the external evidences about the anti-Arian attitude of Antony all suggest that such declaration is quite trustworthy. The proposals of Gregg, Groh and Brakke are one-sided and are not acceptable. They have based their arguments too much on a questionable presupposition that everything Athanasius did and wrote was solely for political uses in the Arian controversy, and have overlooked the great influence of ascetic spirituality on the literary career of the bishop.<sup>11</sup>

From personal experience, religious tradition and social culture, Athanasius' spirituality was moulded. This spirituality is expressed in his theology, contextualised in his spiritual teachings, and concretised in the *Vita Antonii*. Like many other ancient fathers, Athanasius lived what he taught. He was himself totally immersed in his religious conviction and driven by his spirituality. Believing that guiding and helping others to the way to heaven is a divine vocation from God, obedience to which is the highest virtue for Christians, he devoted himself almost fully to this mission. Throughout his episcopal career, he tried every effort to encourage people to focus their attentions solely on God. Although being seriously persecuted by the opponents, he still spent a lot of time to write treatises on spiritual, doctrinal and exegetical matters. Only when his pastoral career was severely disrupted did he write directly to defend himself. Whenever he had spare time, he went to visit and encourage the monks in the desert. His relationships with the monks and virgins are so close that he and the ascetics may be said to be interdependent on each other. Both his literary career and monastic career indicate that Athanasius was not so eager in struggling with his opponents. As we have shown, the factors motivating him at the beginning and the end of his controversy with the Arians are both from his religious convictions. It is because the Arian subordinationism is contradictory to the Nicene faith and its spread in the church is harmful to his sacred

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<sup>9</sup> Gregg and Groh, *Early Arianism: A View of Salvation*, p.153. For a discussion of the problems of their view, see Chapter Three part A.3.b of this thesis.

<sup>10</sup> Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, p.264. For a critique of his view, see Chapter Three part A.3.c of this thesis.

<sup>11</sup> See Chapter Three part B and Chapter Four part B.1 of this thesis.

mission that he refused to readmit Arius to communion. It is also because of his spirituality and spiritual teachings that he insistently fought the battle and his numerous supporters bravely resisted the imperial force for him. The whole life of Athanasius was controlled and motivated by his spirituality, which is expressed in his theology. Political combat seems to have never occupied the first place in his mind.<sup>12</sup>

Nowadays, many modern critics hold a hostile attitude towards Athanasius. Basing himself mainly on the London papyri, H. I. Bell believes that the bishop was an intolerant man who suppressed the Melitians with violence.<sup>13</sup> W. H. C. Frend agrees that he did not shrink from the use of violence against opponents.<sup>14</sup> T. D. Barnes even suggests that he had used violence systematically.<sup>15</sup> With a similar viewpoint, R. P. C. Hanson treats him as the most problematic figure causing the unhappy controversy in the fourth-century Christian church.<sup>16</sup> Besides, T. G. Elliott has also charged Athanasius with practising systematic distortion of facts.<sup>17</sup> However, is the evidence supporting their claim so strong? It seems that their evaluation of the character and career of the bishop is not unquestionable.<sup>18</sup> They have put nearly all their attention on Athanasius' political combat with his opponents, but at the same time they have neglected his personal spiritual life and his interest in promoting ascetic lifestyle. Why does this situation occur? One of the key reasons is that most of these modern critics are primarily historians. They approach the bishop mainly in a particular discipline. Their major concern is on institutional influence, and not patristic study. Nevertheless, as we can see, their portraiture of the historical Athanasius is incompatible with the spirituality expressed in his theology, which is harmoniously developed in his ascetic teachings. At the beginning of his special study of Athanasius, Barnes declares explicitly that his study makes no attempt to do justice to the doctrinal, homiletic, ascetic, and exegetical writings of the bishop. The centre of attention is 'those works which are sometimes called Athanasius' "historical writings," but which show a closer resemblance to political pamphlets.'<sup>19</sup> Does his presumption about the violent and deceitful character of Athanasius need to be adjusted under the light of our observations from the doctrinal and ascetic writings? We have definite reasons to question about it.

In our study, we have tried to link together all the historical background, theological system, ascetic teachings, and personal behaviour of Athanasius. Everything

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<sup>12</sup> See Chapter Four of this thesis.

<sup>13</sup> Bell, 'Athanasius: A Chapter in Church History,' pp.158-176.

<sup>14</sup> Frend, 'Athanasius as an Egyptian Christian Leader in the Fourth Century,' p.21.

<sup>15</sup> Barnes, 'The Career of Athanasius,' p.395.

<sup>16</sup> Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p.273.

<sup>17</sup> Elliott, *The Christianity of Constantine the Great*, p.314.

<sup>18</sup> See Chapter Four part A of this thesis.

<sup>19</sup> Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, p.5.

seems to be so coherent and consistent that the duplicity of the bishop appears to be nearly impossible. According to his writings, Athanasius is much more like a pious pastor than an ambitious politician. He seems to be a zealous ascetic and not a fraudulent propagandist. His spiritual piety and religious devotion make the accusation of his systematic violence highly unbelievable. His whole life reveals that he was entirely immersed in the Christian spirituality of his believing community and was completely committed to the mission of guiding people on the way to God. While many modern scholars are trying to 'redeem' the Arians and enter a protest on their behalf, it is not obligatory to 'condemn' Athanasius at the same time. Both of them might have their viewpoints corresponding to their own special situations and personal concerns. It is good to have a fair reassessment on the fourth-century doctrinal controversy. However, on top of it, it is not necessary to demean Athanasius unfairly. In the present time of confusion about the use of contemporary historical witnesses, I believe this thesis has cast some new light on the personal character of the Alexandrian archbishop and his behaviour in the Arian controversy. After decades of devoted study on Athanasius, Professor C. Kannengiesser says, 'Only misguided and misleading historiography in recent times could position him [Athanasius] as a ruthless "pharaoh," hungry for power, and unfair to his opponents. It needs some cold-blooded objectivity for a balanced evaluation of his endurance in surmounting one trial after another from 333 to 363.'<sup>20</sup> Maybe, this statement is too harsh, but it is worthy of the consideration of all modern Athanasian scholars.

Spirituality is an important key for us to understand the life of Athanasius, as well as his theology and ascetic teachings. Of course, it cannot replace special study of his historical life and theological thought. However, in the modern age where numerous views are differently proposed by scholars, an overall knowledge of his spirituality is both essential and crucial for proper understanding of this fourth-century archbishop of Alexandria and appropriate interpretation of his writings. As we have seen above, it can effectively help us to evaluate and assess the correctness of a view about him. Through the lens of spirituality, many fallacies in modern erroneous views can be observed. Having long been ignored, the spirituality of Athanasius is a subject well worth high valuation and thorough analysis.

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<sup>20</sup> Kannengiesser, 'Athanasius of Alexandria and the Ascetic Movement of His Time,' p.489.

## APPENDIX A

### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SPIRITUALITY AND THEOLOGY

Although the terms 'spirituality' and 'theology' both originated from Christianity, they have long been treated as two totally different, or even opposite, things. While theology mainly deals with communal dogma of the church, it is intellectual, objective and academic. Its construction and judgement is often based on 'secular' ideals of reason. In contrast, the major concern of spirituality is personal experience of God. Being formed through 'sacred' devotional faith, it is affective, subjective and very often mystical. This erroneous division perhaps explains the increasing discontentment felt by some with contemporary approaches to spirituality and theology. As A. Jones says, 'The cleavage between theology and devotion is surely a fake one...The ugly breach between "the intellectual" and "the affective" over the centuries has done serious damage to both.'<sup>1</sup> Unless they are united, there is no real substance and no sure orientation in spirituality, and no religious life and no spiritual value in theology.

Some post-modern theorists have argued that it is no longer possible to define any common framework of values. Theological and religious doctrines are just like shopping options. They have no natural spiritual consequences. This results in an internalisation of spirituality. Personal spiritual experience becomes isolated from communal belief and ethics. It is not the intention of our study to criticise this new spiritual view. However, even if we use this privatised definition, spirituality and theology are still inseparable if they are to be faithful to one's own belief. Concerning their relationship in Christianity, P. Sheldrake says in his new book, 'We cannot do theology without risking faith commitment and we cannot be committed to Christian practices without attending to the fundamental beliefs that underpin the Christian story.'<sup>2</sup> The two intimately belong together. Here, the following historical survey may help us to trace the reasons behind the long divorce of spirituality and theology, and indirectly at least to understand their relationship in Athanasius' writings.

Augustine of Hippo argues in his *De Trinitate* that God is known not by *scientia* but by *sapientia*.<sup>3</sup> In other words, one can gain knowledge of divine things only through loving contemplation and not through objective analysis.<sup>4</sup> From the very beginning, patristic theology was linked closely with one's own devotion to God. Theology and

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<sup>1</sup> A. Jones, 'Spirituality and Theology,' *Review for Religious* 39 (1980/2):162.

<sup>2</sup> P. Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology: Christian Living and the Doctrine of God* (London, 1998), p.3.

<sup>3</sup> Augustine, *De Trinitate* 12.22 (PL 42, col.1009-1010).

<sup>4</sup> For Augustine, *contemplatio* and *sapientia* are the most immediately related words. For a discussion of Augustine's mystical theology, see McGinn, *The Presence of God*, vol.1, chap.7.



spirituality were merged together. As defined by P. Pourrat, spirituality was in the early church the part of theology that dealt with Christian perfection and the ways that led to it.<sup>5</sup> It used to be called ascetic and mystical theology, with its supreme expression in monasticism. Concerning the unity of theology and spirituality, P. Sheldrake further explains that intellectual reflection, prayer and living were for the fathers a seamless whole. To be a theologian means that a person has contemplated the mystery of the incarnation and possesses an experience of faith. Patristic theology involved the constant reading of the Scriptures, which was then shaped in the liturgy and in critical dialogue with Greco-Roman culture. Theology was done through a process of interpreting the Scriptures with the aim of deepening the Christian life, and it was always more than an intellectual exercise. Early theologians did not write about 'spirituality' or 'mysticism' as distinct disciplines. P. Sheldrake basing himself on this understanding even says explicitly that the very heart of patristic theology was mystical.<sup>6</sup> Two great emblematic writers on mysticism in the early church are Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor.<sup>7</sup> This devotional patristic theological orientation continued at least to the time of Anselm of Canterbury, who still saw faith and reason, love and knowledge of God, as one single enterprise.<sup>8</sup>

However, one should note that the definition of 'spirituality' in the early church is different from the modern one. In this connection, M. A. McIntosh has pointed out two significant points about the early Christian use of the term 'spiritual.' Firstly, the spiritual is that dimension of life that is engendered and empowered by God. Spirituality, in other words, is not something the believer has but is a new pattern of personal growth taking place in the Christian community and which is basically a gift of God. Besides, the spiritual is also connected with the active presence of God and not primarily with extraordinary inner experiences. Spirituality in this early sense, therefore, is not connected with the cultivation of particular interior experiences but with the new network of communal relationship and perception that the presence of God makes possible for each spiritual person.<sup>9</sup> Spirituality in the early church is inherently motivated by and oriented towards God.

The split of spirituality and theology in the modern era is essentially due to the increasing rationalisation of theology. It is difficult to say precisely when this phenomenon started, as it appears to have been a progressive process. Early at the beginning of twelfth century, scholars such as Peter Abailard had already applied

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<sup>5</sup> Pourrat, *Christian Spirituality*, vol.1, p.v.

<sup>6</sup> Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology*, pp.36-37.

<sup>7</sup> For a study of their mystical theology, see McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, pp.44-62.

<sup>8</sup> For spirituality of Anselm, see B. Ward, 'Anselm of Canterbury and His Influence,' *CSP* 1:196-205.

<sup>9</sup> McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, pp.6-7.

dialectical and logical rules in the construction of theology.<sup>10</sup> As the centres of theological explication gradually shifted in the twelfth century from the rural monasteries to the new urban cathedral schools, which later became the European universities, personal devotion to God no longer stood as a prerequisite for the study of theology. In the newly developing scholasticism, theology was categorised into disciplines. While some were related mainly to cognitive thinking, some were chiefly to religious life. Thomas Aquinas, for example, divided his *Summa Theologiae* into several components. Distinct from doctrinal theology, he placed what we now call spirituality in the second part of the treatise as a subdivision of moral theology. Although most theologians in this period still considered sacred contemplation as an inseparable part of theological reflection, the trend of segregating affective and mystical elements from dogmatic theology eventually grew.<sup>11</sup>

Parallel with this trend, a recovery of interest in the mystical theology of Pseudo-Dionysius is found in the High Middle Ages. Inspired by the Dionysian tradition, many theologians, especially those from the monasteries, composed spiritual treatises to redirect the mind of people to religious piety and mystical reality.<sup>12</sup> Contemporary with Peter Abailard, several Cistercian abbots such as Bernard of Clairvaux, William of St. Thierry, Gueric of Igny and Aelred of Rievaulx wrote on subjects like love, contemplation, grace, faith and charity. Although their major concerns seem to be different, their emphases on piety and devotion are the same.<sup>13</sup> Amongst the monastic writers at that time, Hugh and Richard from the Victorine monastery are outstanding. For them, divine thoughts are hidden under the veil of both creatures and the Scriptures, and everything is ultimately to be subordinated to the contemplative life.<sup>14</sup> Defending the Franciscan teachings, Bonaventure also published many spiritual works in the thirteenth century. Portraying the way by which human souls ascend into God as a mystical journey, he values love and contemplation highly. When compared with the divine

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<sup>10</sup> For example, Abailard used Aristotelian logic in his *Theologia Summi Boni* to formulate his doctrine of the Trinity. A. Jones even treats Abailard and Bernard as the representative symbols of scholastic intelligence and affective piety respectively. While the latter won the first battle, the former won the war eventually. Cf. Jones, 'Spirituality and Theology,' p.164. The conventional spelling of the name of this medieval theologian is 'Abelard.' However, according to modern study, 'Abailard' is more accurate. Cf. 'Abelard, Peter,' *ODCC*, pp.3-4.

<sup>11</sup> For a study of the rationalisation of theology in this period, see J. Goff, *Intellectuals in the Middle Ages*, Oxford, 1993.

<sup>12</sup> It was the 'Maximised' Dionysian corpus that made this mystical theology influential in the Middle Ages. For a discussion of the influence of the Pseudo-Dionysian writing in the Christian Church, see P. Rorem, 'The Uplifting Spirituality of Pseudo-Dionysius,' *CSp* 1:144-149.

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of their spiritual writings, see B. Pennington, 'The Cistercians,' *CSp* 1:205-217.

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of Hugh's and Richard's teachings on contemplative life, see G. A. Zinn, 'The Regular Canons,' *CSp* 1:218-228.

illumination God shed on the pious Christian, human wisdom is folly.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, in spite of their efforts, the rationalisation of theology continued.

The decisive divorce of spirituality and theology came at the time of the Enlightenment. As truth was at that time believed to be attained only through objective observation and experiment, traditional ecclesiastical authority was put aside. Theologians increasingly tended to remove subjective components from theology and express faith in terms of cognitive propositions. Instead of situating at the centre, religious life shifted to the margins of theology, as well as social culture as a whole. However, this does not mean that the Christian Church did not talk about mystical or devout things any more. Antithetically, religious movements counteracting this secularisation appeared throughout the centuries. These included, for example, the rise of the Puritans in the sixteenth century, German Pietism in the seventeenth century, and the Wesleyan Movement in the eighteenth century.<sup>16</sup> As academic scholarship was becoming more technical and abstract, the leaders of these movements mostly tended to act more than write, live more than talk. Consequently, the right of constructing theology was given to those people who could communicate 'scholarly' with the secular world. Spiritual things were transmitted practically and were limited mainly to certain pious groups in the Church.

As in the case of their divorce, the recent reintegration of spirituality and theology is also a progressive process. Several factors, such as Christians' long dissatisfaction with the irreligiousness of modern theology and the increasing interest in interdisciplinary conversations in the post-modern world, underlie this dramatic change. P. Sheldrake has cited four important factors. First, instead of being limited to the elite such as monastic celibates, spirituality has been broadened to include reflection on the values and lifestyles of all Christians. The term 'spirituality' has gained considerable ecumenical acceptance and so studies of it tend to draw on the riches of a shared Christian heritage rather than being limited to sectarian understandings of life in the Spirit. Second, spirituality has become more fruitfully associated with mainline theology and biblical exegesis than it has been over the last few hundred years. A number of major theologians and theological schools once again take experience seriously as a subject for reflection. Third, contemporary spirituality as an area of reflection attempts to integrate religious and human values rather than to concentrate exclusively on such narrowly conceived matters

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<sup>15</sup> For a discussion of Bonaventure's teachings on Franciscan spirituality, see J. A. W. Hellmann, 'The Spirituality of Franciscans,' *CSp* 2:41-44.

<sup>16</sup> For discussions of the spirituality of these movements, see R. C. Lovelace, 'The Anatomy of Puritan Piety: English Puritan Devotional Literature,' *CSp* 3:294-323; A. C. Outler, 'Pietism and Enlightenment: Alternatives to Tradition,' *CSp* 3:240-256; and D. Trickett, 'Spiritual Vision and Discipline in the Early Wesleyan Movement,' *CSp* 3:354-371.

as stages of prayer. Finally, the basic understanding of 'context' has become much more fluid in recent decades. While religion still tends to be strongly linked to specific cultures, there is an increasing convergence of world cultures, which changes the context for religion through a new global encounter of world faiths. In the inter-religious dialogue, Christian spirituality derives its specific characteristics from certain traditional and fundamental beliefs.<sup>17</sup>

Many modern theologians have contributed to this re-engagement of spirituality and theology. Considering personal prayer as a communal act where Christians participated in the praying of Jesus Christ, K. Barth gave theological foundation for religious life.<sup>18</sup> By defining faith in terms of mystical and religious experience, P. Tillich redirected the interest of theological discussion onto inner spirituality.<sup>19</sup> Following him, B. Lonergan suggests that all people have a disposition to move from personal experience to an understanding of it, and that choice and decision is based on this process. Religious experience, and particularly conversion, is in this way the heart of theological inquiry.<sup>20</sup> Rather than beginning with the concept of God, K. Rahner started his theology with people's shared human experience. Besides, he also made acceptable the language previously used mainly for spirituality such as 'openness to mystery' and 'self-transcendence.'<sup>21</sup> With some difference, another modern theologian H. U. von Balthasar espoused a theology from God instead of from personal experience. While regarding all theology as potentially spiritual in that it should transcend purely rationalist thinking, he equally insists that all spirituality should be theological in that its meaning is necessarily associated with revelation.<sup>22</sup> When criticising Protestant piety, W. Pannenberg hints that there is a reciprocal relationship between theological reflection and spiritual experience. The classical doctrines of Reformation theology, such as *sola fides*, on the one hand respond to deep spiritual needs and on the other hand give birth to a new spirituality.<sup>23</sup> Dealing with the problem more directly, A. Louth suggests, 'It is in *contemplation* that theology and spirituality meet. Theology is one of the fruits of contemplation, the attempt to express and articulate what is perceived in this "free and clear vision"; spirituality is

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<sup>17</sup> Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology*, pp.55-62.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. D. L. Migliore, 'Freedom to Pray: Karl Barth's Theology of Prayer,' *Spirituality and Theology*, ed. E. O. Springsted (Louisville, 1998), pp.112-123.

<sup>19</sup> Tillich says on this point, 'The sources of systematic theology can be sources only for one who participates in them, that is, through experience.' P. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol.1 (London, 1953), p.46.

<sup>20</sup> B. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London, 1972), pp.101-124.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. A. Carr, 'Theology and Experience in the Thought of Karl Rahner,' *Journal of Religion* 53 (1973):359-376.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. M. A. McIntosh, *Christology from Within: Spirituality and the Incarnation in Hans Urs Von Balthasar*, *Studies in Spirituality and Theology*, vol.3 (Notre Dame, 1996), pp.13-16, 26-29.

<sup>23</sup> W. Pannenberg, *Christian Spirituality and Sacramental Community* (London, 1984), pp.13-17.



the preparing of the soul for contemplation.’<sup>24</sup> Other contemporary theologians or Christian scholars having important contributions on this issue include D. Tracy, J. Macquarrie, D. Allen, J. Moltmann, S. Schneiders, B. McGinn, K. Leech, R. Williams and many others.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to individual theologians, there are also two modern theological schools having notable influence on the reaffirmation of the close relationship of spirituality and theology. They are liberation and feminist theologies. The theology of the liberationist is basically constructed and reflected inductively from the communal life situation, such as poverty and oppression. It is inherently linked with personal experience. As G. Gutiérrez said, ‘The kind of reflection that the theology of liberation represents is conscious of the fact that it was, and continues to be, preceded by the spiritual experience of Christians who are committed to the process of liberation.’<sup>26</sup> In this way, spirituality is a source of theological reflection, and theology is in turn intimately related to the explanation of spiritual experience.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, feminist theologians also see spirituality as a key source of theology. On this point, A. E. Carr explains, ‘As the experience of God’s salvation in Christ and the response of individuals and groups to that salvation, spirituality can be understood as the source of both theology and morality.’<sup>28</sup> They seek to integrate the critique of patriarchal tradition theoretically in their theology and express this consciousness practically in their lives and spirituality.<sup>29</sup>

Today, few Christian scholars will be suspicious of the close relationship between spirituality and theology. However, the method of reintegrating them is still under debate. As A. Jones said, their break has never really been healed.<sup>30</sup> Effort is still being spent on this long problem. Concerning its present development, three new books published in 1998 are instructive. The volume, *Spirituality and Theology*, edited by E. O. Springsted, contains ten individual but also related essays, and is divided into two parts. The first part ‘Spirituality and the Nature of Christian Theology’ discusses the relationship between faith and reason, spirituality and theological knowledge. The second part examines various aspects of Christian spirituality and illustrates how they affect the formation of

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<sup>24</sup> A. Louth, *Theology and Spirituality* (Oxford, 1978), p.7.

<sup>25</sup> For surveys of the contributors of the reintegration of spirituality and theology, see Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology*, pp.65-72; and McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, pp.90-118. See also the various essays in Hanson’s *Modern Christian Spirituality* for studies of modern spirituality.

<sup>26</sup> G. Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People* (London, 1984), p.1.

<sup>27</sup> For a discussion of the spirituality of the liberationist, see P. Scharper, ‘Liberation, Spirituality of,’ *DCS*, pp.247-248.

<sup>28</sup> A. Carr, *Transforming Grace: Christian Tradition and Women’s Experience* (San Francisco and London, 1988), p.202.

<sup>29</sup> For studies of the feminist spirituality, see S. B. Purvis, ‘Christian Feminist Spirituality,’ *CSp* 3:500-519; and N. C. Ring, ‘Feminine Spirituality,’ *DCS*, pp.148-150.

<sup>30</sup> Jones, ‘Spirituality and Theology,’ p.164.

theology. As the book is composed of works from different contributors, diverse positions and views may be observed. However, as the editor states in the introduction, all the writers of the publication appear to believe that spirituality as the Christian practice of knowing God is vital to the understanding of theology.<sup>31</sup> On the relationship of spirituality and theology, the key contribution is provided by Springsted himself. By coordinating thought and life, he suggests that theology is spiritual. In the process of thinking of God, the thinkers are at the same time involved in Him in such a way that their spirits are improved by that thinking. Theological thought is related to a change in the spirituality of the thinker, which comes from an active relationship with God.<sup>32</sup>

By comparison, M. A. McIntosh's *Mystical Theology* is more systematic. Again, the book is divided into two parts. The first part 'Issues of History and Method' defines the problems relating to the integrity of spirituality and theology, and provides some historical models showing how ancient and modern theologians dealt with them. After the brief survey, a new proposal about the process of interpreting and appropriating spirituality in the work of contemporary constructive theology is brought forward. In the second part 'Mystical Theology in Practice,' the author offers some examples of how his new model may work in practice. Being inspired by the works of B. McGinn, McIntosh proposes that spirituality and theology have their common ground in the believing community's encounter with God. Spirituality is the *impression*, which encounter has in the continual transformation of the members of the church. Theology is the *expression* of that encounter in the attempt to understand and tell something true of the mystery that the believing community encounters.<sup>33</sup> Concerning the hermeneutics of mystical texts, he suggests that it may function as a location for the Word's encounter with believers. To enter into the meaning of a mystical text is to allow one's own categories for understanding and experiencing reality to be transformed by the reality of the other.<sup>34</sup>

P. Sheldrake's *Spirituality and Theology* is also composed of two main sections. The first section discusses methodological questions, in which the divorce and reengagement of spirituality and theology are explored both ontologically and historically. Section two of the book concretises the methodological theories with real examples and case studies. Concerning the relationship of spirituality and theology, Sheldrake suggests that it is like a wheel intersected by an axle. While the wheel of theology rotates around an axle of spirituality, spirituality, being three-dimensional,

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<sup>31</sup> E. O. Springsted, ed., *Spirituality and Theology: Essays in Honor of Diogenes Allen* (Louisville, 1998), p.2.

<sup>32</sup> E. O. Springsted, 'Theology and Spirituality: Why Theology is not Critical Reflection on Religious Experience,' *Spirituality and Theology*, ed. E. O. Springsted (Louisville, 1998), pp.49-62.

<sup>33</sup> McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, p.11.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.133-136.

points outwards beyond the constraints of purely theological definition and method into another dimension.<sup>35</sup> Functionally, theology offers criteria for evaluating spirituality and vice versa. On the one hand, every version of spirituality should be judged in reference to fundamental Christian beliefs like the Trinitarian God. On the other hand, spirituality unifies all attempts to approach the reality of God and offers a vital critique of any attempt by theology to launch itself into some stratosphere of timeless truth, abstract distinction or ungrounded definition.<sup>36</sup>

Obviously, the suggested methods for reintegrating spirituality and theology are different, but not mutually exclusive, in these three books. It seems that the debate is still ongoing and we cannot at present draw any definite conclusion about the precise relationship between spirituality and theology. However, two points relating to our study may be observed from this overview. Firstly, theology and spirituality are and must be closely related. Their divorce has been harmful to both. Secondly, the unfortunate dissolution of spirituality and theology started only in the High Middle Ages. For most early church fathers, they are inseparable and belong to the same enterprise. Theology is the written presentation of an outlook that involved spirituality. Spiritual teachings are formulated from one's own spirituality, and thus from one's theology. They all point towards God.

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<sup>35</sup> Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology*, p.88.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.88-95.

## APPENDIX B

### THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST IN ATHANASIUS

Similar to Trinitarian faith, the doctrine on Jesus was for many ancients a radical, or even implausible, concept. There existed great tension between their original belief and the new proclamation by the early believers. In Hellenism, God was popularly thought to be transcendent, impassible and also inaccessible. However, the Jesus of Nazareth spoken of in the Scriptures could both perform miracles with great divine power and suffer like ordinary human beings. He was proclaimed to be the only Son of God, but at the same time he had lived on earth as a man. Such combination of divinity and humanity was a great challenge for many early Christian thinkers. However, although there were various theories like Ebionitism and Adoptionism proposed to resolve this tension, the mainstream of the early Church was to accept this biblical teaching by faith.<sup>1</sup> Of course, this orthodox doctrine of incarnation was also adopted by Athanasius. He believes that the Son in order to save men from death (θάνατος) and corruption (φθορά) condescended to the created universe. Being made man and bearing a human body, He may be said to be created. However, He was not lessened (ἡλαττοῦτο) by the assumption of the body (τῇ περιβολῇ τοῦ σώματος), but rather deified (ἐθεοποιεῖτο) it and rendered it immortal (ἀθάνατον).<sup>2</sup> So in His earthly life, He was still absolute holiness (αὐτοαγιασμός) and absolute life (αὐτοζωή).<sup>3</sup>

In the late fourth century, an increasing concern on the inner composition of the incarnate Word arose. While some fathers suggested that Jesus was composed of the divine Λόγος and human σάρξ, others argued that Jesus should have full humanity and thus should also have a human ψυχή. Concerning the humanity of the incarnate Word, the actual position of Athanasius has long been an academic debate. While some scholars treat him as a hidden supporter of Apollinarian Λόγος-σάρξ Christology, others argue that he nowhere rejected the existence of a human soul in Jesus. As the whole problem is enormous and complicated, a thorough treatment of the issue is far beyond the scope of our study. However, since the incarnation of Christ is key to Athanasius' whole theology and hence his spirituality, a brief review of the question is given below. Basically, the problem may be divided into three areas: the humanity of Christ in Athanasius' doctrinal

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<sup>1</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus and Tertullian all defended this doctrine of Incarnation firmly. Cf. Ignatius, *Epistula ad Ephesios* 19 (Lightfoot & Harmer, p.148); Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 3.9.3 (PG 7, col.871-872); and Tertullian, *Adversus Praxean* 27 (PL 2, col.190-192).

<sup>2</sup> *De Decretis* 14 (PG 25, col.448).

<sup>3</sup> *C. Gent.* 47 (Thomson, p.130).



and apologetic treatises, the historical context and explanation of *Tom. Ant. 7*, and the authorship of *De Incarnatione Contra Apollinarium*.

Being a steadfast defender of Nicene faith, Athanasius has long been regarded as a pious saint whose theology including Christology is entirely orthodox. However, in 1841 F. C. Baur first denied that Athanasius admitted a human soul in Christ.<sup>4</sup> Then, in 1899 K. Hoss and A. Stülcken criticised that the bishop did not assign any important role to the human soul of Christ.<sup>5</sup> Although their view was immediately rejected by G. Voisin,<sup>6</sup> M. Richard followed them and pointed out in 1947 that Athanasius has consciously declined the human psychology of Christ and his authority as a theologian of the incarnation is questionable.<sup>7</sup> Richard's view was afterwards taken and developed by many scholars, such as J. N. D. Kelly,<sup>8</sup> J. Roldanus,<sup>9</sup> A. Grillmeier<sup>10</sup> and A. Louth.<sup>11</sup> In 1988, R. P. C. Hanson published a comprehensive study of the Arian controversy. Based mainly on certain passages in *Orationes contra Arianos*, he argues that Athanasius' Jesus is either without human soul or with a totally functionless soul. Hanson likens Athanasius' view of the incarnation of the Word to putting on an elaborate space-suit. Every decision or action was completely subjected to the control of the impassible Λόγος, and all human limitations and weaknesses of Jesus are apparent and due to the instrumental body only.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, such a critical judgement is not heard without objection. Beginning from 1954, many scholars including I. O. de Urbina, C. Constantinides, P. Galtier and G. D. Dragas have defended the traditional view against these attacks.<sup>13</sup> In 1975, T. F. Torrance wrote an essay pointing out that Athanasius frequently used 'flesh' to mean full humanity. By focusing on Christ's role as the vicarious representative of men, Torrance argues that Christ must Himself be human in order that he might act on behalf of human

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<sup>4</sup> F. C. Baur, *Die christliche Lehre von der Dreieinigkeit und Menschwerdung Gottes*, vol.1 (Tübingen, 1841), p.570f.

<sup>5</sup> K. Hoss, *Studien über das Schrifttum und die Theologie des Athanasius* (Freiburg, 1899), pp.76-79; and A. Stülcken, *Athanasiana: Litterar- und Dogmengeschichtliche Untersuchungen*, TU 19 (4), 4 (Leipzig, 1899), pp.90-106.

<sup>6</sup> G. Voisin, 'La doctrine christologique de saint Athanase,' *RHE* 1 (1900):226-248.

<sup>7</sup> M. Richard, 'St. Athanase et la psychologie du Christ selon les Ariens,' *Mélanges de science religieuse* 4 (1947):5-54.

<sup>8</sup> Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrine*, pp.284-289.

<sup>9</sup> Roldanus, *Le Christ et l'homme dans la théologie d'Athanasie d'Alexandrie*, pp.230-276.

<sup>10</sup> Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, pp.194-219.

<sup>11</sup> Louth, 'Athanasius' Understanding of the Humanity of Christ,' pp.309-318.

<sup>12</sup> Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, pp.446-458.

<sup>13</sup> I. O. de Urbina, 'L'anima umana di Christo secondo S. Atanasio,' *OCP* 20 (1954):27-43; C. Constantinides, 'Ἐδίδασκεν ὁ μέγας Ἀθανάσιος ὅτι εἶχεν ὁ Κύριος ἀνθρωπίνην ψυχὴν,' *Ὁρθοδοξία* (Κωνσταντινούπολις) 29 (1954):286-293, 446-452; 30 (1955):92-98; 31 (1956):69-78; P. Galtier, 'St. Athanase et l'âme humaine du Christ,' *Gregorianum* 36 (1955):553-589; and G. D. Dragas, 'The two treatises of Saint Athanasius "Contra Apollinarem," Second thoughts on the research of the critics,' *Ath*, pp.157-172. The arguments of all these essays are summarised in Dragas, 'Athanasius Contra Apollinarem,' pp.356-389.

beings.<sup>14</sup> In 1981, A. Pettersen wrote a thesis defending the existence of a human soul in Athanasius' Christology. After reviewing one by one all the key passages, he concludes, 'For Athanasius, then, the humanity of Christ, which existed only in the continuous creative care of the divine Logos, was truly and fully human; that true humanity was that through which man's full humanity was redeemed and reconciled to God.'<sup>15</sup> Disappointingly, according to the references quoted in their works, it seems that both Louth and Hanson have failed to consider most of the above defences.<sup>16</sup> Certainly, Athanasius' apologetic treatises can give readers a strong impression of having undervalued the humanity of Jesus. However, this phenomenon is not unexplainable. As Hanson himself recognised, the Arians were at that moment using the limitations and weaknesses of the incarnate Christ to demonstrate the inferiority of the Son in contrast to the Father. The obligatory task of Athanasius' apologetic treatises, especially *Orationes contra Arianos*, was not to provide a systematic exposition of Christian doctrines but to defend the status of the Son. His unbalanced emphasis on the divine nature of the Λόγος in the life of Jesus is totally understandable. If Torrance's and Pettersen's observations are right, Athanasius may well have had in his mind the idea that there is a human soul in the incarnate Christ, though the idea was often not expressed clearly for circumstantial reasons. Actually, as illustrated by I. O. de Urbina and A. Pettersen, there are numerous additional texts in Athanasius' works suggesting a Λόγος-ἄνθρωπος view.<sup>17</sup> We cannot reject his orthodox position simply because he overemphasised the divinity of the Word in his anti-Arian treatises.

Amongst the contentious passages, the one in *Tom. Ant.* 7 seems to be the most crucial. Here, Athanasius declares explicitly that the divine Λόγος did not assume a σῶμα ἄψυχον. Apparently, this is a powerful proof of his acknowledgement of Jesus' complete humanity. However, there have been many attacks on this opinion from scholars. From a redaction-critical point of view, R. Weijenborg suggests that the statement is a possible

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<sup>14</sup> Torrance, 'Athanasius: A Study in the Foundations of Classical Theology,' pp.215-266. This study was reviewed by C. C. Twombly. Though questioning some of its arguments, Twombly acknowledges that Torrance has thrown light on the character of Christ's humanity and his view is better than that of Grillmeier. Cf. C. C. Twombly, 'The nature of Christ's humanity: a study in Athanasius,' *Patristic and Byzantine Review* 8 (1989):227-241.

<sup>15</sup> A. Pettersen, 'The Humanity of Christ in the Theology of Athanasius of Alexandria,' Ph.D. diss. (Durham University, 1981), p.275. Part of his arguments was published in 1986 and 1987 as A. Pettersen, 'Did Athanasius deny Christ's Fear?' *SJTh* 39 (1986):327-340; and 'The Courage of Christ in the Theology of Athanasius,' *SJTh* 40 (1987):363-377.

<sup>16</sup> Louth, 'Athanasius' Understanding of the Humanity of Christ,' pp.309-318; Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, pp.446-458.

<sup>17</sup> de Urbina, 'L'anima umana di Cristo secondo S. Atanasio,' pp.27-43. The arguments in the articles are summarised in Dragas, 'Athanasius Contra Apollinarem,' pp.358-363. For arguments of the genuine humanity of the incarnate Christ, see also Pettersen, *Athanasius*, pp.120-132.

Apollinarian interpolation introduced after the death of Athanasius.<sup>18</sup> On the interpretation of the text itself, scholars such as A. Grillmeier propose that the denial of σῶμα ἄψυχον is simply because the divine Word has acted in the place of ordinary human soul in the body of Jesus. The word ἄψυχον should be translated as 'lifeless' instead of 'soulless.' Athanasius was actually holding a view very similar to that of the Apollinarians.<sup>19</sup> Judging from the historical context of the Synod of Alexandria, R. P. C. Hanson argues that the realisation of the necessity of allowing a human soul to Jesus came to Athanasius only late and had no effect at all on his thinking before the year 362. When he had realised that the Λόγος-σάρξ model was designed to display the inferiority of the Son to the Father in the Arian view, Athanasius took fright and recognised a human soul in Jesus. However, he had never seriously integrated this realisation into his doctrine of the incarnation.<sup>20</sup> As the first view above is based on a questionable supposition that the crucial statement in *Tom. Ant.* 7 was a deliberate Apollinarian interpolation and the second one is clearly a forced meaning imposed on the text not matching its particular context, they are now generally rejected by scholars.<sup>21</sup> Concerning the third one, A. Pettersen published in 1990 a detailed reconstruction of the historical context of the Synod of Alexandria. He points out that the reconciliation of the Melitians and the Eustathians was central to the business of the synod. Since the Arians had denied a human soul in the incarnate Christ and Melitius was formerly ordained by them, it was necessary to show the Eustathians that the Melitians were not supporters of Arianism. The affirmation of Christ's human soul in the *Tom. Ant.* is completely natural. Athanasius and his parties were just elaborating the Nicene Creed's καὶ σαρκωθέντα καὶ ἐνανθρωπήσαντα, which they were used to believing.<sup>22</sup>

The third battleground relating to this controversial issue is the authorship of *De Incarnatione Contra Apollinarium* 1-2. Since these two anti-Apollinarian treatises could powerfully demonstrate the author's recognition of human soul in Jesus, their attribution to Athanasius is essential for determining his doctrine of incarnation. From the beginning, these two works were regarded as Athanasian. In 1889, J. Dräseke first challenged this traditional view, which was a few years later defended by H. Sträter. The subject was afterwards discussed diversely by many scholars, including A. Stülcken, K. Hoss, E. Weigl, A. Stegmann, and C. E. Raven. Although J. Lebon and P. G.

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. R. Weijenborg, 'Apollinaristic Interpolations in the *Tomus ad Antiochenos* of 362,' *StP* 3 (1961):324-330.

<sup>19</sup> Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, pp.206-217. However, according to the following sentences, this denial of σῶμα ἄψυχον is linked with the belief that salvation is not of body only, but of soul also. Grillmeier's interpretation seems to be out of context. Cf. *Tom. Ant.* 7 (PG 26, col.804).

<sup>20</sup> Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p.452, 647.

<sup>21</sup> For criticisms of these two views, see Dragas, 'Athanasius Contra Apollinarem,' pp.355-356.

<sup>22</sup> Pettersen, 'The Arian Context of Athanasius of Alexandria's *Tomus ad Antiochenos* VII,' pp.183-198.

Demetropoulos have tried to assert the Athanasian authorship in 1927 and 1953 respectively, the issue was not settled.<sup>23</sup> Many scholars such as F. Cayre, J. Quasten and M. Geerard still treat the two treatises as dubious or spurious.<sup>24</sup> Nowadays, the most extensive and exhaustive study of the problem is the long dissertation published in 1985. Through historical survey of scholarly opinions, analysis of all external and internal evidences, and comparison of the Christology of the treatises with that of Athanasius, G. D. Dragas attempted to show that there were no solid reasons for denying the traditional view on the authorship of *C. Apol.* 1-2. Athanasius' contribution to the Church's theological tradition should be reaffirmed.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, the debate was not ended. A few years later, G. C. Stead attacked Dragas' work in a book review<sup>26</sup> and the Athanasian authorship of the two anti-Apollinarian treatises was rejected again in different publications by scholars such as H. Chadwick, R. Winling and R. P. C. Hanson.<sup>27</sup> Although their investigations are fragmentary, they have at least established a fact that there are still some obstacles on the way of readmitting the traditional view. Unless these obstacles are removed, the two treatises *C. Apol.* 1-2 can only be considered as *dubia*.

In his recent publication, K. Anatolios has presented the problem in a new way. He tries to explain Athanasius' doctrine of incarnation through the entire structure of his theological system.<sup>28</sup> Basically, he makes three major points. First, Athanasius' primary concern is to expound the relation between God and human beings, and not to analyse the internal structure of the being of Christ. The body for him signifies what most immediately belongs to humanity. It has all human attributes.<sup>29</sup> Second, what Athanasius said is the Λόγος took to Himself, and not that he just put on, a human body. In the

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<sup>23</sup> For a full survey of the history of criticism of *C. Apol.* 1-2, see Dragas, 'Athanasius Contra Apollinarem,' pp.13-90.

<sup>24</sup> Cayre, *Manual of Patrology and History of Theology*, p.348; Quasten, *Patrology*, vol.3, p.29; and CPG, vol.2, no.2231.

<sup>25</sup> The entire approach and arguments of Dragas may best be seen from his conclusion, 'If the external witnesses, the manuscript tradition and the internal evidences are unanimously in favour of the Athanasian authorship, and if the style, the doctrine of death and the conception of the soul of Christ present no obstacles to it, and if finally and most importantly the total Christological perspective of the two APO is most certainly Athanasian, we cannot but demand from modern scholars to return to the traditional view.' Dragas, 'Athanasius Contra Apollinarem,' pp.599-600.

<sup>26</sup> G. C. Stead, Review of Dragas, 'Athanasius Contra Apollinarem,' *JThS* NS 39 (1988):250-253.

<sup>27</sup> H. Chadwick, 'Les deux traités Contre Apollinaire attribués à Athanase,' *Ἀλεξανδρῖνα: Hellénisme, judaïsme et christianisme à Alexandrie. Mélanges offerts au P. Claude Mondésert* (Paris, 1987), pp.247-260; R. Winling, 'La résurrection du Christ dans les traités pseudo-athanasiens Contra Apollinarium,' *Revue des sciences religieuses* 62 (1988):27-41; and Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, pp.645-651.

<sup>28</sup> See also his two related articles: K. Anatolios, 'The Soteriological Significance of Christ's Humanity in St. Athanasius,' *Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 40 (1996):265-286; and K. Anatolios, "'The Body as Instrument': A Reevaluation of Athanasius' Logos-sarx Christology [Critique of Alois Grillmeier's interpretation of Athanasius]," *CCR* 18 (1997):78-84.

<sup>29</sup> Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought*, pp.62-64, 78-82.



incarnation, humanity was made to become ‘proper’ (ἵδιος) to the divine Word, which produced a paradoxical result: Christ both suffers and does not suffer. This explains why the Λόγος sometimes appears to be passible and sometimes not. However, Athanasius asserts that such combination was not in equilibrium. As divinity is much more powerful than humanity, the former in the incarnation ‘deified’ the latter.<sup>30</sup> Lastly, through the study of his spiritual writings, Anatolios argues that neglect of Christ’s human soul is foreign to Athanasius. The divine-human co-working logic demands that the internalisation of divine power in Antony’s soul be correlated with an emphasis on Christ’s own human soul. Although the bishop did not say so directly on this point, the idea is implied.<sup>31</sup> Anatolios’ arguments are not totally persuasive, but they can surely be regarded as good supportive evidences for Athanasius’ Λόγος-ἄνθρωπος position.

Summing up all we have discussed above, it is clear that while the evidences supporting Athanasius’ recognition of Christ’s human soul are not conclusive, the arguments for rejecting it are even weaker. Although the two anti-Apollinarian treatises are dubious and cannot at this moment be used as a proof, it is still appropriate to accept provisionally Athanasius’ orthodox Λόγος-ἄνθρωπος position in view of the teachings in his apologetic writings, especially that in his *Tom. Ant.* 7. While he has never formally denied the existence of human soul in Jesus, he has officially affirmed it. Besides, K. Anatolios’ work has also removed many obstacles on the way to accepting this view. Unless new powerful and persuasive evidences emerge, I see no reason for treating Athanasius as a supporter of the Λόγος-σάρξ Christology.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp.82-84, 144-146.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp.177-195, 201-203. On this point, Anatolios emphasises, ‘That Christ humanly appropriates or receives the gift which He himself divinely gives is what makes the Incarnation for Athanasius the supreme instance of grace.’ Anatolios, ‘The Soteriological Significance of Christ’s Humanity in St. Athanasius,’ p.286.

## APPENDIX C

### THE CONCEPT OF DEIFICATION OF ATHANASIUS

The deification of man is one of the fundamental themes of patristic thought, largely in the Greek Church.<sup>1</sup> Although some use the term 'divinisation' (θέωσις), most earlier church fathers use 'deification' (θεοποίησις, *deificatio*) to denote the idea that human beings, by grace, become partakers of the divine nature in Christ.<sup>2</sup> As B. Studer observed, its relevant vocabulary had undergone a considerable evolution. Θεοποίησις and its various forms appeared only from the time of Clement of Alexandria. Under the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius, θέωσις gradually became more important. The equivalent Latin terms *deificare* and *deificatio* only obtained a rather modest importance in the fifth century. The reality itself was frequently expressed by many other words, both Greek and Latin, like ἀφθαρσία, μέθεξις, κοινωνία, ένωσις, ὕψωσις, *glorificatio*, and *profectus ad Deum*.<sup>3</sup>

In parallel with this vocabulary, the idea of deification has also undergone long historical development. In ancient Roman culture, there was a custom of regarding emperors and heroes as gods after their death, which was extended to their lifetime from the time of Domitian.<sup>4</sup> However, this pagan custom, as D. L. Balás has noted, manifested only a terminological similarity without deeper influence on the Christian doctrine. The principal influence here came from the Greek definition of deity as possessing immortality, so that the promise of receiving immortality in Christ was expressed by the idea of deification.<sup>5</sup> In certain extent, the idea of deification (θεοποίησις) may be said to have originated from the Scriptures. In the Old Testament, the first human couple was created in the image (צֶלֶם) and likeness (דְּמוּת) of God.<sup>6</sup> Individuals having an especially intimate relation with God such as Moses, Elijah and Elisha were called 'man of God' (אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים).<sup>7</sup> In the New Testament, the divine Λόγος became man in order to save human beings from the terrible consequence of sin. Through His saving works, men by

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<sup>1</sup> The doctrine of deification seems to be more important and central for the eastern fathers than the western. Cf. D. L. Balás, 'Divinization,' *EEChr* 1:338-340.

<sup>2</sup> Although pagan religions had similar themes, such as deification of heroes by the attaining of divine status, long ago, it seems that the real sources of the doctrine of deification are found in the Scriptures, such as 2 Pt. 1:4. Cf. Balás, 'Divinization,' p.338.

<sup>3</sup> B. Studer, 'Divinization,' *EEChu* 1:242.

<sup>4</sup> The term they often used is ἀποθέωσις. Cf. 'Apotheosis,' *ODCC*, p.92.

<sup>5</sup> Balás, 'Divinization,' p.338.

<sup>6</sup> Gen. 1:26-27.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Moses (Deut. 33:1; Jos. 14:6), Elijah (2 Kg. 1:9-13), Elisha (2 Kg. 4:1-44), and other servants of God (1 Sam. 9:7-10; 1 Kg. 13:1-34).

grace might partake in the Spirit,<sup>8</sup> become sons of God,<sup>9</sup> and anticipate the future divine glory.<sup>10</sup> In 2 Peter 1:4, believers are spoken of being able to become ‘partakers of the divine nature’ (θείας κοινωνοὶ φύσεως). After quoting Psalm 82:6, Jesus affirmed that those who had received ὁ λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ might be called ‘gods’ (θεοί).<sup>11</sup> All these are important themes constituting the Christian concept of deification.<sup>12</sup>

In the early Christian Church, the concept of deification continued to develop in terms of themes like intimate union with God, the divine gift of immortality and participation in the heavenly glory. In his epistle to the Ephesians, Ignatius persuaded the recipients to act together in harmony with the bishop so that God might acknowledge that they were members of his Son and that they might be in perfect unity (ἐν ἁμώμῳ ἐνότητι) with and have a share in God (θεοῦ μετέχῃτε).<sup>13</sup> Besides, he also pictures the Eucharist as the medicine of immortality (φάρμακον ἀθανασίας), which enables believers to live forever in Jesus Christ.<sup>14</sup> When quoting Psalm 82:6, Justin Martyr asserts that the human race may become children of God (Θεοῦ τέκνα).<sup>15</sup> In Theophilus, the idea and terminology of deification were further developed. For him, immortality is a reward for keeping the commandments of God.<sup>16</sup> In his famous dogmatic treatise *Adversus Haereses*, Irenaeus also discussed in detail the concept of Christians’ becoming divine by communion with God.<sup>17</sup>

In the Eastern Church, although Clement used the term θεοποίησις repeatedly in a negative sense, such as the making of idols, the positive sense expressing the process of Christian perfection also appeared several times in his writings.<sup>18</sup> He sees deification as a process where man rises from disbelief (ἄπιστία), through faith (πίστις) and knowledge (γνώσις), to love (ἀγάπη).<sup>19</sup> The incarnate Λόγος for Clement has two major functions. On the one hand, He bestows a new life to every believer, which begins the process of

<sup>8</sup> Jn. 14:15-31, 16:7-15.

<sup>9</sup> Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:5-7.

<sup>10</sup> 2 Cor. 3:18; 1 Jn. 3:1-3.

<sup>11</sup> Jn. 10:34-35.

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of the biblical foundation of deification, see P. B. T. Bilanink, ‘The Mystery of *Theosis* or Divinization,’ *The Heritage of the Early Church*, ed. D. Neiman and M. Schatkin (Rome, 1973), pp.342-347.

<sup>13</sup> Ignatius, *Epistula ad Ephesios* 4.2 (Lightfoot & Harmer, p.138).

<sup>14</sup> Ignatius, *Epistula ad Ephesios* 20.2 (Lightfoot & Harmer, p.150).

<sup>15</sup> Justin, *Dialogus cum Tryphone Iudaeo* 124 (PTS 47, pp.284-285).

<sup>16</sup> Theophilus, *Ad Autolycum* 2.27 (PTS 44, p.77).

<sup>17</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 4.1.1-2, 4.20.5, 4.38.3-4, 4.39.2 (PG 7, col.975-976, 1035-1036, 1107-1109, 1110).

<sup>18</sup> Clement, *Cohortatio ad Gentes* 9.87.2, 11.114.4 (GCS 12, p.65, 81); *Stromata* 6.15.125 (GCS 15, p.495).

<sup>19</sup> Clement, *Stromata* 2.22.136, 7.10.55-59 (GCS 15, p.188; GCS 17, pp.40-43); *Paedagogus* 1.6.26 (GCS 12, p.105).

deification. On the other hand, He also manifests God on earth such that believers may know through His model how to be deified.<sup>20</sup> The concept of deification gained its greatest development in the theology of Origen. B. Drewery says concerning Origen's use of deification, 'It appears as the crowning term of a number of converging lines of thought.'<sup>21</sup> In addition to Clement's proposal, he also views the Son as the Λόγος of the Father through whom rational creatures may participate in the Trinity (*participio trinitatis*).<sup>22</sup> By means of a series of spiritual journeys, human deification may be achieved through divine contemplation and ascetic practice. For Origen, the entire Scriptures are full of allegories of spiritual journey.<sup>23</sup> Under such background, Athanasius constructed his doctrine of deification.

In the extant Athanasian writings preserved in Greek, the words with the same root as θεοποίησις emerge 58 times in total, most of which are in the verbal form θεοποιέω.<sup>24</sup> According to Lampe's *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, the word θεοποιέω means 'make into a god.' The fathers use it mainly in three areas: creature-worship, Christological use, and deification of Christians.<sup>25</sup> Athanasius applies the word mainly in the last two senses. In his apologetic treatises, he expresses repeatedly that 'He [the Word] became man in order that we might be deified' (αὐτὸς γὰρ ἐνηνθρώπησεν, ἵνα ἡμεῖς θεοποιηθῶμεν).<sup>26</sup> Besides using the word directly, as other early fathers, Athanasius has also employed different related vocabulary to express the idea. According to our existing material, he has at least used the word κοινωνία 69 times, ἀφθαρσία 37 times, ἔνωσις 28 times, ἀθανασία 27 times, ἁγιασμός 10 times, and ὑψωσις 8 times.<sup>27</sup> Although the doctrine of deification had undergone a considerable evolution, as K. E. Norman has illustrated, by the fourth century both the terminology and general outlines of the Christian version of deification were well established.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Refer to Chapter One part A.1 and B.2.a of this thesis.

<sup>21</sup> B. Drewery, 'Deification,' *Christian Spirituality: Essays in Honour of Gordon Rupp*, ed. P. Brooks (London, 1975), p.44.

<sup>22</sup> Origen, *De Principiis* 4.4.4-5 (GCS 22, pp.354-356); *Commentarii in Ioannem* 2.3.21-2.3.33 (GCS 10, pp.55-57).

<sup>23</sup> Refer to Chapter One part A.1 and B.2.a of this thesis. See also Crouzel, *Origen*, pp.130-133.

<sup>24</sup> The Greek word θεοποιέω appears 51 times, θεοποίησις 3 times, θεοποιία 3 times, and θεοποιός 1 time. Cf. Müller, *Lexicon Athanasianum*, col.628-629.

<sup>25</sup> 'θεοποιέω,' *PGL*, pp.630-631.

<sup>26</sup> *De Incarn.* 54 (Thomson, p.268). See also *De Decretis* 14; *Or. Ar.* 1.39; and *De Syn.* 51 (PG 25, col.448; PG 26, col.92-93, 784-785).

<sup>27</sup> Müller, *Lexicon Athanasianum*, col.765, 182, 498, 24-25, 8, 1516. In addition, Athanasius has used the verb ἀγιάζω 59 times, ὑψόω 47 times, and κοινωνέω 44 times; and also the adjective ἀθάνατος 44 times and ἀφθαρτος 30 times. Cf. Müller, *Lexicon Athanasianum*, col.7-8, 1514-1516, 764, 26, 182.

<sup>28</sup> Norman, 'Deification: the Content of Athanasian Soteriology,' chap.1. See also the discussion in M. D. Nisipel, 'Christian Deification and the Early Testimonia,' *VC* 53 (1999):289-304.



For Athanasius, the incarnation of ὁ Λόγος is the basis of men's deification. In the process, humanity was joined to divinity. However, the divine Word was not impaired by the incarnation, but deified (ἐθεοποίησεν) what He put on. Christ's body was raised to the level of deity in the union.<sup>29</sup> Being bound together in Him through the likeness of the body, Christians might be deified as well.<sup>30</sup> The exaltation (ὑψώσεις) of Christ's humanity is the foundation as well as the archetype of our deification.<sup>31</sup> In a doctoral thesis, J. R. Meyer has defined clearly Athanasius' use of the term 'deification.' The incarnation made Christ the mediator between God and men. Men are saved in Him by being assimilated to the Lord's body. Deification is the incorporation of man's being into His body, in the Spirit of the Son.<sup>32</sup> It is because of man's 'likeness' (ὁμοίωσις) to Him that he obtains the divine attributes like immortality and incorruptibility.<sup>33</sup> In view of this, P. Nellas is not groundless when he calls deification 'Christification.'<sup>34</sup> In the incarnation, humanity was said to be joined to divinity, and divine attributes and divine glory were bestowed on man. Consistently, such deification of men and their union with God the Father are through the Son and in the Spirit.<sup>35</sup>

In the past, when talking about the substance of the deification of man, many scholars equated the bishop's deification with physical incorruptibility or immortality. W. R. Inge, for example, suggests that the attribute of divinity which was in the minds of the Greek fathers when they talked about deification was that of *imperishableness*.<sup>36</sup> While acknowledging that the emphasis of the restoration of man's incorruptibility in redemption may be found in Irenaeus, H. Rashdall writes that it was Athanasius who developed and systematised the thought.<sup>37</sup> Seeing deification as a principle example of the Hellenisation of Christian doctrine, M. Werner even says explicitly that Athanasius was 'an effective defender of the new "physical" doctrine of the Redemption.'<sup>38</sup> The analysis of deification as primarily physical incorruptibility or immortality is subscribed to also by such scholars as A. Loisy,<sup>39</sup> J. Rivière,<sup>40</sup> and J. Lawson.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Or. Ar.* 1.42 (PG 26, col.100).

<sup>30</sup> *Or. Ar.* 2.70 (PG 26, col.296).

<sup>31</sup> *Or. Ar.* 1.45 (PG 26, col.105).

<sup>32</sup> J. R. Meyer, 'Saint Athanasius on Divinization,' D.Th. diss., Universidad de Navarra, 1991.

<sup>33</sup> *Or. Ar.* 2.74 (PG 26, col.305). See also *Or. Ar.* 2.61 (PG 26, col.277).

<sup>34</sup> P. Nellas, *Deification in Christ: Orthodox Perspectives on the Nature of the Human Person*, tr. N. Russell (New York, 1987), pp.121-139.

<sup>35</sup> Athanasius says on this point, 'It is then in Him [the Spirit] that the Logos glorifies (δοξάζει) creation, and, by deifying (θεοποιῶν) and adopting (υιοποιῶν) it, draws (προσάγει) it to the Father.' *Ad Serap.* 1.25 (PG 26, col.589).

<sup>36</sup> W. R. Inge, *Christian Mysticism* (London, 1899), p.13.

<sup>37</sup> H. Rashdall, *The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology* (London, 1919), p.296.

<sup>38</sup> M. Werner, *The Formation of Christian Dogma: A Historical Study of its Problem* (London, 1957), p.168.

<sup>39</sup> A. Loisy, *Le Mystères Païens et le Mystère Chrétien* (Paris, 1914), p.348.

In 1980, K. E. Norman wrote a thesis specifically discussing Athanasius' doctrine of deification. He points out that immortality is for the bishop not the equivalent of divinity.<sup>42</sup> However important this attribute is to Athanasius, it is only one aspect of his doctrine of deification. The basis of this exaltation is our union with God through participation in Him, not simply the removal of death as a threat to our being.<sup>43</sup> In the thesis, Norman lists eight aspects of Athanasius' concept of deification. They are i) the renewal of mankind in the image of God; ii) the transcendence of human nature; iii) the resurrection of the flesh and immortality of the body; iv) incorruptibility, impassibility and unchangeableness; v) participation in the divine nature and the qualities of godliness; vi) the knowledge of God; vii) the inheritance of divine glory; and viii) the heavenly kingdom.<sup>44</sup> For Athanasius, deification indicates a real advancement and exaltation of our humanity to a divine level of existence. Θεοποίησις is no mere poetic expression or metaphor, it means to be made God or a god, in the sense that we reflect His glory and holiness.<sup>45</sup>

Norman's thesis is minute and detailed, and is correct in general. From the extant writings of Athanasius, it seems that the term deification is closely linked to many aspects. Through the salvific acts of Christ, men's image of God was renewed and their knowledge of God was restored. Such renewals are basic requirements for deification.<sup>46</sup> With the grace of the Triune God, men may transcend their original human nature and move forwards to a divine level of life.<sup>47</sup> From the works of Athanasius, it appears that such deified life has many important attributes of God. They include, for example, immortality,<sup>48</sup> incorruptibility,<sup>49</sup> impassibility,<sup>50</sup> and unchangeability.<sup>51</sup> Besides,

<sup>40</sup> J. Rivière, *Le dogme de la Rédemption*, étude théologique (Paris, 1914), pp.86-88.

<sup>41</sup> J. Lawson, *The Biblical Theology of Saint Irenaeus* (London, 1948), p.154.

<sup>42</sup> Norman, 'Deification: the Content of Athanasian Soteriology,' p.131.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.139.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., chap.4.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p.164.

<sup>46</sup> As stated before, for the bishop, the image and the knowledge of God are closely linked together. Concerning their relation with deification, Athanasius says, 'God created Him for our sakes, preparing for Him the created body, as it is written, for us, that in Him we might be capable of being renewed (ἀνακαινισθῆναι) and deified (θεοποιηθῆναι).' *Or. Ar.* 2.47 (PG 26, col.248). In another passage, he writes, 'Having renewed it [the body] as its framer, He might deify it' (τοῦτο ὡς δημιουργὸς ἀνακαινίσας, ἐν ἑαυτῷ θεοποίησιν). *Or. Ar.* 2.70 (PG 26, col.296). It seems that renewal is a necessary step to deification.

<sup>47</sup> In more than one instance, Athanasius suggests the superiority of the redeemed state to the created one. Cf. *Or. Ar.* 1.44, 2.67 (PG 26, col.104, 289-292).

<sup>48</sup> Athanasius connects the vanquishment of death with deification in his *De Incarn.* By the death of Christ, 'immortality (ἡ ἀθανασία) has come to all...For he became a man that we might be deified (θεοποιηθῶμεν).' *De Incarn.* 54 (Thomson, p.268). Here, one should note that death (θάνατος) and corruption (φθορά) are basically two different things. While death means departure of the soul from the body, corruption mutates men back to non-existence.

<sup>49</sup> On this point, Athanasius writes that Christ both 'destroyed death and bestowed incorruptibility (ἀφθαρσίαν) on all through the promise of the resurrection.' *De Incarn.* 32 (Thomson, p.212). Because of the incarnation, 'men no longer remain sinners and dead according to their proper affections, but having

deification may also involve the exaltation of men, and hence the inheritance of divine glory and the heavenly kingdom. When discussing the exaltation of Christ's human nature, Athanasius says directly, 'exaltation was its being deified' (ὑψώσις ἦν τὸ θεοποιεῖσθαι αὐτόν).<sup>52</sup> Such exaltation of man is a result of his relationship with Christ's humanity. Men are not by nature worthy for such glory. It is through their participation in the Son that men are exalted.<sup>53</sup> In view of this multiple significance of deification, Norman is not unreasonable in concluding that, 'Rather than being a mere euphemism for physical immortality, θεοποίησις was perhaps the only apt word to describe the richness and sublime content of the soteriology of Athanasius.'<sup>54</sup>

If the doctrine of deification is so important for Athanasius, why do we not use this term to describe his soteriological substance? Here, we should note that, although deification is a key doctrine for the eastern fathers, it is not a good term for the comprehension of modern western readers. It is too easy to be misinterpreted. Concerning its actual meaning, as C. R. Strange observes, Athanasius did not regard deification simply as a becoming god, but as a change in man brought about by his relationship with the humanity of Christ. That manhood was transformed first of all, thereby becoming the immediate source of a share in the divine nature for the rest of mankind.<sup>55</sup> Athanasius applies the term 'deification' only in a very relative way to men living on earth. They acquire the divine attributes not by nature, but by grace and by participation only. Besides, as P. B. T. Bilaniuk points out, in the process of deification the human person is divinised, and by no means de-humanised or bereft of its human qualities. On the contrary, concomitant to deification is the process of true humanisation,

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risen (ἀναστάντες) according to the Word's power, they abide ever immortal (ἀθάνατοι) and incorruptible (ἄφθαρτοι).' *Or. Ar.* 3.33 (PG 26, col.393).

<sup>50</sup> As Athanasius says, 'And He [the Saviour] Himself, being impassible by nature (ἀπαθὴς τὴν φύσιν), remains as He is, not harmed by these affections, but rather obliterating and destroying them. And men, as their passions are changed and abolished in the Impassible, henceforth become themselves impassible (ἀπαθείς) and free from them forever.' *Or. Ar.* 3.34 (PG 26, col.396-397). Here, as Norman observes, for the bishop, impassibility (ἀπάθεια) implies not only immunity from suffering, but independence of normal bodily needs, such as food and drink, and the sinful desires of the flesh. Cf. Norman, 'Deification: the Content of Athanasian Soteriology,' p.154.

<sup>51</sup> Biological mortality implies changeability through decay. As God is unchangeable and free from any possibility of corruption, deification must include the characteristics of incorruptibility and unchangeableness. On this point, Athanasius declares clearly that men might be stabilised and might escape from the consequences of their corruptible nature by the grace of the participation of the Word (χάριτι τῆς τοῦ Λόγου μετουσίᾳ). Cf. *De Incarn.* 5 (Thomson, 144).

<sup>52</sup> *Or. Ar.* 1.45 (PG 26, col.105).

<sup>53</sup> Athanasius says on this point, 'We were exalted (ὑψώθημεν) because the Highest Lord is in us (ἐν ἡμῖν).' *Or. Ar.* 1.43 (PG 26, col.101).

<sup>54</sup> Norman, 'Deification: the Content of Athanasian Soteriology,' p.171.

<sup>55</sup> R. Strange, 'Newman and Athanasius on Divinization,' *Christliche Heiligkeit als Lehre und Praxis nach John Henry Newman*, ed. G. Biemer and H. Fries (Sigmaringendorf, 1988), p.47; and 'Athanasius on Divinization,' p.343. See also *Or. Ar.* 1.43 (PG 26, col.100).

because man comes closer to God, the ground of being and perfection.<sup>56</sup> However, according to the lexicon, deification means ‘make into a god.’<sup>57</sup> Instead of the above intent, it literally implies the transformation of humanity to divinity, and the exaltation of man onto the position of god. For this reason, its use was and is objected by many western Christians. B. Drewery even criticises that the true pedigree of deification is to be sought, not in the biblical revelation, but in Greek philosophy. Participation in the divine nature can hardly be ‘a legitimate ideal for those who worship the one God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.’<sup>58</sup>

Even worse, until now, we still do not possess a single clear theological definition of deification. Concerning the patristic use of the concept, G. M. Schurr observes that by about 200 Hippolytus and Clement of Alexandria were already using the term ‘deification,’ without apology or explanation, to specify the hope of the Christian. In the fourth century, Athanasius continued the tradition of looking towards the deification of the Christian, using θεοποιέω as if they were ‘common Christian coin.’<sup>59</sup> Despite the centrality of deification for the soteriology of the Greek fathers, as Jules Gross observes, none of them has given a precise definition for the term θέωσις or its equivalents which they used.<sup>60</sup> According to our existing materials, none of the early fathers had written a single separate treatise on deification. They invariably treated it as an unutterable mystery. Such tradition had at least extended to the Middle Ages. When talking about the doctrine of deification of Gregory Palamas, one of the greatest Orthodox theologians of the later Byzantine period, G. I. Mantzaridis writes, ‘The deification of man is a mystical event which takes place within him through God’s supranatural power, and as such is essentially unutterable. Palamas himself avoided speaking of it, because he reckoned it impossible to express in words or logical forms.’<sup>61</sup> For this reason, interpretation and misinterpretation of the term continue without end.

Even if we focus our attention solely on the use of ‘deification’ in Athanasius’ own writings, there are still many problems. First of all, as other fathers, Athanasius has not provided any clear definition of the term. He has not written any treatise on systematic theology like modern theologians. All his works are composed for particular purposes, either apologetic or pastoral. In other words, it is not obligatory for him to give a minute

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<sup>56</sup> Bilanink, ‘The Mystery of *Theosis* or Divinization,’ p.352. For Athanasius’ teachings about the reliance of men’s existence on their relationship with God, see *C. Gent.* 2 (Thomson, p.6).

<sup>57</sup> ‘θεοποιέω,’ *PGL*, pp.630-631.

<sup>58</sup> Drewery, ‘Deification,’ pp.54-55.

<sup>59</sup> G. M. Schurr, ‘On the Logic of Ante-Nicene Affirmation of the “Deification” of the Christian,’ *AnThR* 51 (1969):97.

<sup>60</sup> J. Gross, *La Divinisation du Chrétien d’après les pères grecs* (Paris, 1938), p.349.

<sup>61</sup> G. I. Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man: St. Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition*, tr. L. Sherrard (New York, 1984), p.127.



description of his concept of deification. In fact, although having used the term many times, he seldom discusses it in detail. Usually, it is mentioned only when there is real practical need. The most problematic thing is that Athanasius himself has not used the term coherently. For example, in his *Orationes contra Arianos*, he writes, 'For therefore did He [the Word] assume the body originate and human, that having renewed it as its farmer, He might deify it in Himself (ἐν ἑαυτῷ θεοποιήσῃ), and thus might introduce us all into the kingdom of heaven after His likeness (καὶ οὕτως εἰς βασιλείαν οὐρανῶν εἰσαγάγῃ πάντας ἡμᾶς καθ' ὁμοιότητα ἐκείνου). For man had not been deified (ἐθεοποιήθη) if joined (συναφθεῖς) to a creature, or unless the Son were very God.'<sup>62</sup> In this passage, it is clear that deification refers to the union of humanity with divinity. It does not include the exaltation into heaven, but is its prerequisite only. However, in another passage of the same treatise, Athanasius suggests that deification is a synonym of exaltation (ὑψώσεις).<sup>63</sup> He seems to be inconsistent in the use of this term. For the above reasons, instead of the confusing 'deification,' a more general and comprehensible term 'spiritual advancement' is used in this thesis.

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<sup>62</sup> *Or. Ar.* 2.70 (PG 26, col.296).

<sup>63</sup> *Or. Ar.* 1.45 (PG 26, col.105). According to the previous passage, it is certain that such exaltation involves the ascension into heaven. Cf. *Or. Ar.* 1.43 (PG 26, col.101).

## APPENDIX D

### MISCELLANEOUS DOCUMENTS

#### 1. London Papyrus 1914: Bell's Translation<sup>1</sup>

To my beloved brother Apa Paiêou and Patabeit (ἄπα Παιηοῦ καὶ Παταβεῖτ), priests (πρεσβυτέρους), Callistus (Κάλλιστος) greeting in the Lord God. We wish you to know the events which have occurred here; for you heard at the time what we suffered that night at the house of Heraclius the recorder. For there were also certain brethren of them that came to you with us in the house and they can themselves inform you of what occurred. Well, after that day, on the twenty-fourth of Pachon, Isaac the Bishop of Letopolis came to Heraiscus at Alexandria, and he desired to dine with the Bishop in the Camp. So the adherents of Athanasius (οἱ διαφέροντες Ἀθανασίου), hearing of it, came bringing with them soldiers of the Dux and of the Camp; they came in a drunken state (οἰνόμενοι) at the ninth hour, having shut the Camp, wishing to seize both him and the brethren. So certain soldiers who were in the Camp and had the fear of God in their hearts, hearing of it, took them and hid them in the store-chambers in the Camp; and when they could not be found they went out and found four brethren coming into the Camp; and they beat them and made them all bloody, so that they were in danger of death, and cast them forth outside Nicopolis. After they had cast them forth they departed again to the Gate of the Sun, to the hostel in which the brethren are entertained, and they seized five others there and confined them in the Camp in the evening; and they shut them up till the *praepositus* came out to the guard-room towards morning; and the *praepositus* and the scribe took them and he ordered them to be cast forth out of Nicopolis; and Heraclides the keeper of the hostel they bound and maltreated, threatening and enjoining him: "For what reason did you admit the monks of the Meletian party into the hostel?" Another brother Ammon, who was in the Camp and himself receives the brethren, they shut up in the Camp, forbidding him to receive monks in his house. For there is no other brother but these two who receives the brethren; they made them play the coward. So we are greatly afflicted, being separated by them each in his own place; and so we troubled that they will not suffer us to depart to the *papas* Heraiscus and visit him; for on the night in which the brethren were maltreated the *praepositus* of the soldiers sent a report to the Bishop saying: "I sinned and was drunken in the night, in that I maltreated the brethren". And that day he had a service said, though he is a Gentile, on account of the sin which he committed. [*In the left margin, from top to bottom of the*

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<sup>1</sup> Bell, *Jews and Christians in Egypt*, pp.61-63. The Greek insertions and italic notes are added by myself according to the Greek text.

*papyrus*] Athanasius is very despondent (μεγάλως ἄθυμῖ), and on his side he causes us distress by reason of the writings and the reports that come to him from abroad, since the Emperor, having found Macarius abroad at court,...to -yrus writing...that having bound him and...he should..., in order that...So Archelaus the...and...having departed with Athanasius son of Capito, [*Verso*] wishing to carry off Macarius, the report came to Apa John at Antioch; he came and seized them and put them under arrest, because they had written vile slanders against Heraiscus, and Archelaus himself took the letters abroad. It was God who sent the three of them abroad and keeps them abroad! So Athanasius heard this news, that Archelaus was arrested, and Athanasius is very despondent. Often (?) did they come for him, and till now he has not left the country; but he had his baggage embarked at sea as though he would leave the country, and then again he took his baggage off the ship, not wishing to leave the country....I have written to you in order that you might know in what affliction we are; for he carried off a Bishop of the Lower Country and shut him in the Meat Market, and a priest of the same region he shut in the lock-up, and a deacon in the principal prison, and till the twenty-eighth of Pachon Heraiscus too has been confined in the Camp—I thank God our Master that the scourgings which he endured have ceased—, and on the twenty-seventh he caused seven Bishops to leave the country; Emês and Peter are of their number, the son of Toubestis. Do not neglect us then, brethren, since they left behind the bread, in order that it might not be taken outside, on account of the Bishop, to the intent that he might keep it by him. For when buying loaves for our sustenance I bought at 14 talents the artaba of wheat. As soon therefore as you find a competent person send me a few loaves. I greet (ἀσπάζομε) my father Prauous (?) and all the brethren who are with him, and Theon the deacon and Saprion and Horion and Papnutius and Apa Sarmates and Paomius and Pior and Eudaemon and Apa Tryphon and Gerontius and Apa Hierax and Apa Helenas and Apa Harêous and Apa Piam and Cornelius and Pisatius and Colluthus and Joseph and his children and Phines. So do not neglect, my father (πατήρ), to send to Psais of Terot for the artaba of wheat, and cause Touan of Tamourô as well to depart to Tamourô for the artaba of wheat; for the days are come when they should receive them. I greet Paul the lector and Apa Elias and Anubas the elder and Anubas the younger and Pamutius and Titouês and his children and Hor of Toumnakon and all his brethren who are with him and Papnutius and Leonides his brother and the other brother who is with them. [*At the foot, the opposite way up*] To Apa Paiêou and Patabeit, from Callistus.

## 2. Arian Letter to Alexander (*Urkunde* 6)

Our faith from our forefathers, which also we have learned from you, Blessed Pope, is this: We acknowledge one God, alone ingenerate, alone everlasting, alone unbegun, alone true, alone having immortality, alone wise, alone good, alone sovereign, judge,

governor, and overseer of all, unalterable and unchangeable, just and good, God of law and prophets and New Testament; who begot an only-begotten Son before eternal times, through whom he has made both the ages and the universe; and begot him, not in substance, but in truth; and that He made Him subsist at His own will, unalterable and unchangeable; perfect creature of God, but not as one of the creatures; offspring, but not as one of things begotten; nor as Valentinus pronounced that the offspring of the Father was an issue; nor as Manichaeans taught that the offspring was a portion of the Father, one in essence; or as Sabellius, dividing the Monad, speaks of a Son-and-Father; nor as Hieracas, of one torch from another, or as a lamp divided in two; nor that He who was before, was afterwards generated or new-created into a Son, as you too yourself, blessed Pope, in the midst of the Church and in session had often condemned; but, as we say, at the will of God, created before times and before ages, and gaining life and being from the Father, who gave subsistence to His glories together with Him. For the Father did not, in giving to Him the inheritance of all things, deprive Himself of what He had ingenerately in Himself; for He is the fountain of all things. Thus there are three subsistences. And God, being the cause of all things, is unbegun and altogether sole, but the Son being begotten apart from time by the Father, and being created and founded (κτισθεὶς καὶ θεμελιωθεὶς) before all ages, was not before His generation (οὐκ ἦν πρὸ τοῦ γεννηθῆναι), but being begotten (γεννηθεὶς) apart from time before all things, alone was made to subsist by the Father. For He is not eternal (αἰδιος) or co-eternal (συναἰδιος) or co-unoriginate (συναγένητος) with the Father, nor has He His being together with the Father (οὐδὲ ἅμα τῷ Πατρὶ τὸ εἶναι ἔχει), as some speak of relations, introducing two ingenerate beginnings, but God in before all things as being Monad and beginning of all. Wherefore also He is before the Son; as we have learned also from your preaching in the midst of the Church. So far then as from God He has being, and glories, and life, and all things are delivered unto Him, in such sense is God His origin. For He is above Him, as being his God, and before Him. But if the terms “from Him,” and “from the womb,” and “I came forth from the Father,” and “I am come” (Rom. 11:36; Ps. 110:3; Jn. 16:28) be understood by some to mean as if a part of Him, one in essence or as an issue, then the Father is according to them compounded and divisible and alterable and material, and, as far as their belief goes, has the circumstances of a body, who is the incorporeal God.



## APPENDIX E

### THE FESTAL EPISTLES OF ATHANASIUS

Corrected No. Date	Transmitted No. Date	Note: Language/Nature/Status
1 329	1 329	Syriac + Coptic
2 330	24 352	Coptic + Greek/Fragment
3 331	14 342	Syriac
4 332	4 332	Syriac
5 333	5 333	Syriac
6 334	6 334	Syriac + Coptic
7 335	7 335	Syriac
10 338	10 338	Syriac
11 339	11 339	Syriac
12 340	12 340	Syriac/Letter to Serapion
13 341	13 341	Syriac
14 342	3 331	Syriac
17 345	17 345	Syriac/Notification
18 346	18 346	Syriac/Notification
19 347	19 347	Syriac
20 348	20 348	Syriac
22 350	22 350	Greek/Fragment
24 352	2 330	Syriac + Coptic
25 353	25 353	Coptic
26 354	26 354	Coptic
27 355	27 355	Coptic + Greek/Fragment
28 356	28 356	Coptic + Greek/Fragment
29 357	29 357	Coptic + Latin-Syriac-Greek/Fragment
36 364	36 364	Coptic/Dubious
37 365	37 365	Coptic
38 366	38 366	Coptic
39 367	39 367	Coptic + Greek
40 368	40 368	Coptic
41 369	41 369	Coptic + Greek/Fragment
42 370	42 370	Coptic + Greek/Fragment
43 371	43 371	Coptic + Greek
44 372	44 372	Syriac/Fragment
45 373	45 373	Greek/Fragment

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